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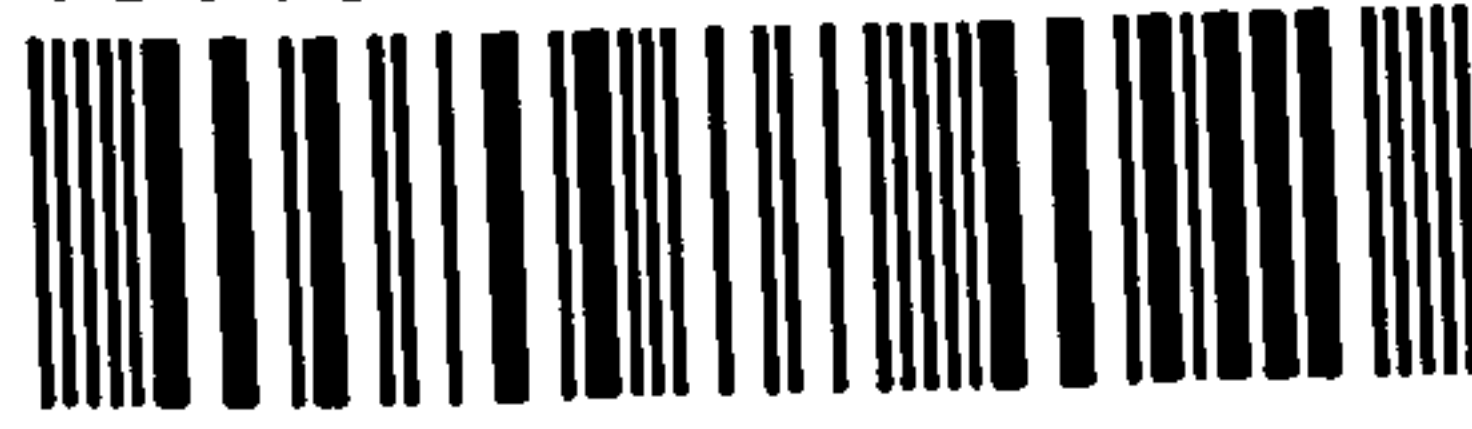
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: REFUGE PROVISION IN MALAYSIA

ZABIDAH PUTIT

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in School Policy Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

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Abstract

Refuges have become a controversial form of provision for abused women in Malaysia. Questions such as What are the factors that challenge the establishment of refuges in Malaysia? What other options has Malaysia to offer these women? Has other provision been so effective that Malaysia does not need refuge provision? have yet to be answered. Although the provision of refuge has been much debated, the issues are under-researched as the establishment of the first refuge in Malaysia only took place in 1982. After two decades, there are only a handful of refuges in Malaysia; few managed to establish and sustain themselves while some failed even to initiate the implementation of their ideas. This study, therefore, sought from the service users and providers information regarding refuge in Malaysia. It focuses on women's experiences of being abused and staying in the refuge.

It adopts a qualitative research approach using case studies of the two refuges that volunteered to participate in this study. The study integrated the conceptual framework of the human ecological system and the model of 'Women in Crisis - 3 Stages Intervention'. In pursuing these methodological approaches, various research strategies were employed such as the use of interviews and document analyses. The interviews draw on the experiences and voices of the residents and workers at the refuge and the professionals, individuals, organisational activists and other social workers who work in the field of domestic violence. In terms of document analyses, field notes and secondary sources including relevant documents from both refuges and other related organizations were collected and examined to produce a comprehensive analysis.

Themes emerging from the data were identified. The study findings opened up further discussion and examination of some issues that were "hidden and unclear" issues of conflicts and constraints experienced by the women. The analysis provides evidence that these contradictions arise from societal values and beliefs. A model of 'Women in Crisis - 3 Stages Intervention' was developed based on the women's experience in the refuge. This looks at women's experience of crisis and how support is utilised in the process of their entering and leaving the refuge. It also takes into account the way in which the women sought support whenever it was needed long after leaving the refuge. The findings also point to the need for refuges to offer programmes and activities that help build the women's esteem, confidence and empowerment. Further, the finding of this study shows that a wider interrelated support within the women's ecological system is needed if domestic violence is to be addressed.

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Last but not least, I offer my highest praise and utmost gratitude to Almighty ALLAH for the continuous guidance.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED:.....

DATE:.....SEPTEMBER 2008

Key to transcriptions

The following abbreviations and conventions have been used in the presentation of research findings:

Italics Represent the interview data from the study participants. The original text was in mixed language i.e Malay and English and was translated into English by me. However, where it is not possible to translate adequately, the spoken Malaysian language is retained.

Names Pseudonyms are used for the study participants and city/ towns.

[] denotes researcher's alteration for clarity

..//.. indicates material deleted from the interview excerpts.

... a pause during the participants' story telling.

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Chapter 1 Introduction: The Beginning of the Process

1.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the beginning of the study of domestic violence and refuge provision for women in Malaysia. The chapter begins with the preliminary research topic. It then presents my previous work on abused women, followed by the pathway for this research. Next it sets out the study's research aims. Finally it indicates the organisation of chapters for the thesis.

1.2 Preliminary research topic

My initial proposal was to study the experience of children witnessing domestic violence; an issue I viewed in the Malaysian context as the 'silent scream'. I could not find any study done in Malaysia on this topic despite extensive research. Yet such work is critical and needs public attention. It is an area of extreme importance but also great sensitivity. In the process of thinking and reflecting upon my research proposal, I identified serious problems. Research involving children always raises ethical issues. Collecting data from children witnessing domestic violence may result in extreme distress; I thought how I could plan to deal with this. I am not equipped and neither do I have the experience of dealing with these children. As I explored these issues and discussed them with my supervisors, I was drawn to explore other aspects of violence against women instead.

I am aware that there is still very little literature on violence against women in the Malaysian context, particularly on support services or support systems for abused women. One consequence of this is that the women themselves have had to assume responsibility for a 'private and personal' problem. Yet in reality these problems extend beyond the woman and her family, embracing all of the community and society. I was encouraged to look into the support services for these women. By then I was convinced that I could embark on this research and would be able to build on my previous experience of work in this area.

1.3 My previous experience of work with abused women

This study of domestic violence and refuges in Malaysia was inspired by my first major research project in this field on the “Lived experience of abused women in Malaysia” (East Malaysia). This was my Masters dissertation. I was also given an opportunity to study *Domestic violence in Sarawak* (East Malaysia) by a research grant provided by the Ministry of Social Urbanisation, Sarawak. The two major research projects about domestic violence in Sarawak (East Malaysia) fuelled my passion to explore domestic violence in West Malaysia (Peninsula Malaysia), particularly with reference to refuges. As a volunteer para-counsellor to women abused at the “One Stop Crisis Center” (OSCC), (see page 107 for further explanation) at Sarawak General Hospital, I empathised with the plight of women experiencing domestic violence. Presenting papers and attending workshops and conferences at the national and international level increased my awareness of the needs for further work on issues about violence against women in Malaysia. The increased networking and dialogues with people of similar interest in the field of domestic violence further motivated me to study these issues.

Furthermore, I learnt that the service provision for those experiencing domestic violence in Sarawak excludes refuges. Of the thirteen states in Malaysia, only the refuges run by Women’s Aid Organisation (WAO) in Kuala Lumpur and Pulau Pinang, and few other private refuges survive. Yet, as in other parts of the world, the prevalence of domestic violence continues to remain significant and to reflect the seriousness of this problem.

1.4 Pathway for this research

I reflected on the women (some with children and some not) who had fled their homes seeking emergency shelter and had arrived at the One Stop Crisis Center (OSCC) in the General Hospital, Sarawak. As it aims only to provide emergency services, OSCC allowed them to stay for one to two days at most. In addition there were only two self-contained rooms for such cases. What about the women’s life after OSCC? Where do they go for practical and emotional support? Anecdotal evidence suggested that they often live with relatives and friends who are willing to

accommodate the women and their children i.e keep them away from the abuser. But rather than assuming that such an informal system is adequate in providing support to the women and her children, I was inspired to research into the services that are available to them in the community.

I learned about the existence of refuges through reading literature and through dialogues with social workers but have never had any chance to visit the homes because of the strict rules and regulations preventing people from entering the refuges as visitors. Other than the abused women seeking help, or social workers, no visitors are allowed to enter the refuges. I wished to know the ways in which the refuge services affect the women. Do the principles and work of the refuges meet the needs of the residents? What are the workers' views regarding meeting the needs of the women? What are the philosophical approaches and objectives of the particular refuges? What about the refuge's governance and how it affects the women. What are the services, programmes and activities offered to the women? How does the refuge meet the immediate and long term needs for the women? Such questions influenced the development and shape this study.

1.5 Research aims

In this thesis my main aim was to find out:

- how do and how can the refuges help the abused women experiencing violence from their husbands?

This led to the specific objectives of this study. These include:

- listening to and exploring the experiences of the women 'survivors' from the western region of Malaysia [Peninsular Malaysia]
- exploring the experiences of the women while in the refuges
- examining what changes the women underwent, having sheltered in the refuges

A qualitative research approach was used to accommodate the nature of this explorative and descriptive study of the abused women's experiences of refuge services. This is fully discussed in chapter 5.

1.6 Organisation of the thesis

This section outlines the structure of the thesis. This thesis consists of ten chapters. Below, I present the summary of each chapter:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study, outlining the background which explains how the particular research emerged, including my previous experience of work on abused women and pathway to this research. It also states the research aims.

Chapter 2 presents the context in focus, including the demographics of Malaysia, religious myths, patriarchal dominance, the government's Islamic Religious Department and Court, marriage, and the Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia (1996). This chapter is essential as it explains the context of this study: setting it in the political and socio-cultural circumstances. It argues that broad cultural and social factors contribute to the potential for domestic violence.

In Chapter 3, I provide a review of literature on issues related to the focus of my study, such as domestic violence and refuges in Malaysia. It also presents studies of abused women and their children in North America and the UK. The chapter concludes with a brief history of refuges in the UK, where refuges were first established.

Chapter 4 presents the review of the relevant literature and its context. It demonstrates the theoretical framework of this study. First, the human ecological system theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2001, 2005) helps me to see the women as positioned within a multilayered or nested system. Second, the model of 'needs and support' developed by Hester and Westmarland (2004) helps me to engage with analytical critiques in understanding women in crisis. Drawing from this model, I have developed a model of '**Women in Crisis – 3 Stages of Intervention**' to learn further about abused women, their experiences and ways of leaving the crisis situation.

Chapter 5 introduces the methodology and methods used. It explains the methodological rationale and the ethical considerations. It presents the research designed, and details how the research was carried out and issues that arose during my data collection. It demonstrates how I dealt with my data. It concludes by justifying the validity and reliability of this study.

Chapter 6 together with chapter 7, 8, 9 bring to the fore the findings of this study. Chapter 6 focuses on the two refuges, their organisation and implementation.

Chapter 7 provides the findings together with discussions related to the women's experiences of domestic violence and when they arrived at the refuge.

Chapter 8 presents the study's findings on women's experience while staying in the refuge, followed by a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 9 presents the women's experiences of leaving the refuge and how they planned for their future. The chapter also discusses the situation of those women who have left the refuge and the support after leaving the refuge.

Chapter 10 concludes by revisiting the original research questions in the light of my fieldwork and research data. It brings together the key findings of this study, and suggests ways for overcoming obstacles to establish and maintain refuges. This chapter also reviews strategies to eradicate domestic violence by combining the analysis of this study with that of 'ecological system theory' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2001) and the model of 'Women in Crisis – 3 Stages of Intervention'. This thesis concludes with my reflection on this study and discussion of its strength and limitations, and suggests possible directions for future research.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduces my personal and professional involvement with abused women who have sought help. It stimulated me to undertake further research on issues regarding refuge provision for abused women in the Malaysian context.

Subsequently, the chapter articulates the broad research questions and the specific aims of the study. The following chapter lays the groundwork for the study, presenting the background information on the demographics of Malaysia and further examining the domestic violence legislation.

Chapter 2 Context of the Study: Background of Malaysia

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the context of the study. It briefly describes the demographics of Malaysia. This section includes the ethnic composition, religious practices, gender ratio, family life-style and women's economic and political participation. It is important to include the issues about religious myth and the practice of gender dominance i.e. the patriarchal system and the Government's Islamic Religious Department and the *Shariah* Court discussed in the sections that follow. Next I present issues about marriage in Malaysia. Finally, the chapter provides an overview of the Domestic Violence Act (1996) and its implementation in Malaysia.

2.2 Demographics of Malaysia

Malaysia is located in the heart of Southeast Asia. It covers an area of about 329,758 square kilometers. Malaysia consists of West Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia), and East Malaysia (the states of Sarawak and Sabah, and the Federal Territory of the north-western coastal area of Borneo Island). East Malaysia and West Malaysia are separated by 540 kilometers of the South China Sea. West Malaysia covers 131,598 square kilometers, has its frontiers with Thailand in the north and Singapore in the south, while Sabah, with an area of 73,620 square kilometres, and Sarawak with about 124,449 square kilometers, border the territory of Indonesia's Kalimantan.

West Malaysia is made-up of the following states: the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Perlis, Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. East Malaysia is made-up of Sarawak, Sabah and the Federal Territory of Labuan.

2.2.1 Ethnic-composition

Malaysia is a land of diverse races, cultures, languages and religions. Of the total population of Malaysia in Census 2000¹ (23.27 million), about 98.8% were

¹ The population and housing Census was the fourth decennial census undertaken since the formation of Malaysia in 1963. The forthcoming Census will be 2010. The legal basis for undertaking the census is provided by the Census Act 1969.

Malaysian citizens. Of the total Malaysian citizens, Bumiputera comprised 65.1%, Chinese 26.0% and Indians 7.7%. Non-Malaysian citizens totalled 2.2% in Census 2000. In Sarawak, the predominant ethnic group in Census 2000 was the Ibans which accounted for 30.1% of the state's total Malaysian citizens followed by the Chinese (26.7%) and Malays (23.0%). Other minority ethnic groups make up the rest of the population. Similar data for Sabah showed the predominant ethnic group being the Kadazan Dusun (18.4%) followed by Bajau (17.3%) and Malays (15.3%) (Population and Housing Census 2000).

While the various ethnic groups speak their own dialects, the official language of Malaysia is *Malay* and English is the second language.

2.2.2 Religious composition

It is clear that religion is highly correlated with ethnicity. Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia; its proportion increasing from 58.6% in 1991 to 60.4% in 2000. Under the constitution, Islam is the official religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised along side it in any region of the country. Malaysia, being a multi-religious nation, also has a fair share of those embracing other religions such as Buddhism (19.2%), Christianity (9.1%), Hinduism (6.3%) and Confucianism/Taoism/other traditional Chinese religion (2.6%). The Malaysian culture places high value on courtesy, and harmony, harmonious and cordial relations among family members, neighbours and the community at large. In general, not only do Malaysians respect each other's belief and faiths, but cultural and religious festivals that include Hari Raya, Hari Raya 'Adha, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Deepavali, Thaipusm, Gawai Dayak and Kadazan festival are regarded as important events by the nation.

The purpose of these sections is to illustrate the religious diversity of Malaysia. However it is no way to suggest that Malaysia is such a harmonious country that inter-racial and interfaith conflicts do not exist.

2.2.3 Gender-ratio

Census 2000 revealed that for Malaysia as a whole, men outnumbered women, a

pattern similar to that observed in 1991. In Census 2000 there were 104 males for every 100 females, a marginal increase over the sex ratio of 103:100 in 1991. There seem to be more males than females and there is no literature to explain this phenomenon in Malaysia. This is not very far from the world average of 102 males for every 100 females (UN Statistics Division, 2006). In Census 2000, the ratio of males per 100 females was relatively high for Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan (110:100), Pahang (110:100), Johor (107:100), Sabah (107:100), Negeri Sembilan (105:100), Selangor (105:100) and Terengganu (104:100). On the other hand, women outnumbered men in the states of Perlis, Pulau Pinang and Kedah. However, from the age group beginning 60-64 the phenomenon of women outnumbering men is particularly noticeable and the gap widens with advancing age. This is not unexpected given that life expectancy among females is higher than that of males (Population and Housing Census, 2000).

2.2.4 Family life-style

Malaysian family life-styles reflect ethnic origins. Family life-style within each ethnic group has retained many traditions from the group's homeland. Generally Malaysians maintain strong ties with their family and relatives. Malaysians regard the family as including children, parents, grandparents and other relatives. In rural Malaysia, there are still traditional villages or *kampungs*, where people live as extended families in wooden houses and work together on the farm.

However, those in the urban areas practise a more nuclear family system, with a gradual change of family lifestyle. It was observed that the proportion of urban population had increased to 62.0% in Census 2000 from 50.7% in 1991. Many urban Malaysians have strong ties to the *kampungs* where they grew up, and go back to the *kampung* for weekends and holidays.

Seniority is greatly respected within Malaysian households. Family members are addressed according to their position in the family. For example the father is the leader of the family, followed by the mother, eldest brother and sister.

Men and women usually remain at their parental [family] home until they get married. Traditionally, the man is the head of the family. When a woman marries, she usually moves to the home of her husband's family, where she is expected to be obedient both to her husband and parents-in-law. The women are expected to take primary responsibility for the household chores and the care and supervision of the children, even if they are also earning a living for the family. (Jamayah, Napsiah, Zabidah², Elicebat, 2005, Putit, 2001, Aneeta, 1999). The inference is that a good wife/mother should spend as much time as possible at home looking after the children and maintaining a happy family.

2.2.5 Women's economic and political participation

The ratio of male to female workers is almost equal in Malaysia (Population Census 2000). Women constitute about 48.9% or 11.4 million of the total population of Malaysia. Although women account for 48% of the working age group of 16 - 64 years, they make up only one third of the labour force in Malaysia. Nonetheless, the female participation in labour has increased from 43.5% in 1995 to 45.8% in 1997. This may of course be much lower than the actual participation of women because of underreporting, particularly in the informal sector. Here women may not be documented because helping the family business is not considered 'work', and many temporary jobs are not registered to avoid tax and regulatory authorities (Aneeta 1999).

Reflecting the structural transformation of the Malaysian economy in the last two and half decades, 30.1% of working women were involved in manufacturing and 15.9% in the traditional economy of agriculture, forestry, livestock and fishing in 1995. At the same time women are concentrated in the lower rungs of the hierarchy in the workplace and in the economy as a whole.

Although the percentage of women in the professional, technical and related fields is greater than that of men, women commonly hold a lower position in each

² Zabidah and Putit are used interchangeably. Zabidah instead of Putit is used as reference here as in some countries, like Malaysia and Thailand for example, first names are sometimes used as reference.

organisation. Even in the teaching profession where more than 70% are women, less than 20% of all school principals and officials are women. The highest proportions of women are in the teaching, nursing, dentistry and secretarial workforces.

Women continue to fit in with the traditional perception of being carers and nurturers (Moses and Xavier, 1998, Aneeta, 1999). They are nurses rather than doctors; teachers rather than engineers. The lower female participation in the technical fields is reflected in the lower enrolment in technical schools.

In the manufacturing industries, women form the majority in the top three sectors as they account for 55.5% in electronics, 56.8% in textiles and 89.5% in clothing. However they tend to be in the unskilled and semi-skilled low paid jobs with no prospect for upward mobility or job security (Aneeta, 1999). This is because of the belief that women have nimble fingers and are patient and docile, suited for the tedious and relatively unskilled work (Moses and Xavier, 1998).

However, with increased living costs and the rise of materialism, the improvement of women's education and knowledge and skills has increased their employability and earning capacity. Education has led to changes in the attitudes of women, many of whom have become aware of their options and rights.

2.3 Religious myths and culture

Patriarchal beliefs and attitudes in Malaysia are reinforced by the traditional belief that gives a Muslim man the right to beat his wife, leaving many women unprotected. Women are discriminated against through religious myths and cultures, which perpetuate stereotyped gender roles and protectionist and patriarchal attitudes towards women (All women action society, 2004, WAO 2000a, 2000b, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, Ivy 2001, Nora, 1998, Noraini, 1997). Both the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) and Nora (1998) further argue that stereotyped gender roles and protectionist and patriarchal attitudes are enshrined in the culture that permeates through society, and are reflected in the nation's schools, in places of work, in media, government, laws and in the home.

Malaysia's national religion is Islam. This may be seen as a liberating religion that upheld the status of women some 1400 years ago and gave them rights that were considered revolutionary. In spite of this founding philosophy, current Muslim practices often oppress women, denying them the equality and human dignity granted in the Quran. Indeed, the oppression of women violate Quranic principles of social justice. The central Quranic notion of a common ontology (fitrah) supports arguments for gender equality and the rights of women and counteracts the prevailing tendency in Islamic societies to define rights and obligations of citizens on the basis of gender and faith (Noraini, 1997).

Certainly, the use of violence particularly towards disadvantaged human beings has never been authorized or legitimized in the two highest sources of the Islamic tradition (Quran and the Prophet of Islam). On the contrary, the Quran and the Prophet of Islam were extremely mindful of the fact that at the time of the advent of Islam, in a society in which female infanticide was practiced, girls and women were victims of serious discrimination and degradation. So central was gender-equality and gender-justice to the world view of normative Islam that it gave girls and women not only the right to live along with other fundamental rights given to all human beings, but also many special rights. These took account of their weakness and vulnerability in pre-Islamic Arabian society and were intended to safeguard them from any kind of abuse, oppression or injustice. Love, kindness and justice are stressed in the Quran within the family relationships. Cruelty of all kinds is considered prohibited.

And among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily, in that are signs for those who reflect (30:21).

O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness ..//.. on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing which God brings about through it a great deal of good (4:19).

(Sisters in Islam, 1991, pp.3).

In a Muslim country, it is therefore essential to highlight practices that are contrary to the patriarchal belief. Many argue that patriarchal attitudes and culture have distorted the teachings of Islam. Historically and culturally, many Muslims have come to believe that Allah (God) created women from the man's rib, and the woman is, therefore in her origin, derivative and secondary; that men are inherently superior to women; and that women are for men's use (Sisters in Islam, 1991). These beliefs have been imprinted on the Muslim mind, causing immeasurable harm to women throughout the centuries.

In Malaysia, front-line Muslim women and some organizations including The National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women, The Sisters in Islam and WAO and, some individual writers and researchers are beginning to challenge the patriarchal view. They argue, for example, that men and women are created in pairs and that one gender is not superior to the other. The theme that women and men commenced from a single Self and constitute a pair is integral to Quranic epistemology and is repeated in different contexts throughout the text (Barlas, 2002).

“It is [God] Who hath produced you from a single person (6:98;in Ali,317)

“It is [God] who created you from a single person, and made [his] mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (In love)” (7:189;in Ali,398)

“God has made for you mates (and companions) of your own nature”(16:72;in Ali,675)

“God did create in pairs male and female”(53:45 in Ali,1450)

“of [him]. He [God] made two sexes, male and female”(75:39;in Ali 1653)

“(have we not) created you in pairs?” (78:8;in Ali1673)

“God has produced on earth every kind of Beautiful growth (in pairs)”(50:7;in Ali 1411)

(cited in Barlas, 2002)

In the creation of human beings, the male and female make up the pair. Males and females are not only inseparable in the Quran but they are also ontologically the same, hence equal. The reason the Quran gives for the equality and similarity is that the two sexes were meant to coexist within the framework of mutual love and recognition. Woman and man are created to complement each other for mutual benefit, support, comfort and protection. Barlas (2002) argued that such mutuality presupposes the absence of hierarchy and inequalities.

If society is to enact the literal interpretation of the rules of the Quran, it needs to be sensitized to changes that defeat the moral purposes and objectives of these teachings (Sister in Islam, 1991a). Islam does not allow a husband to act cruelly to his wife, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially or spiritually.

Although I argue from a Muslim perspective because Islam is Malaysia's national religion, similar principles underpin other religious and cultural communities in Malaysia. For example, Fitzmaurice (1993) interpreting biblical texts, points out that bishop affirm that men and women are created equally in the image of God and are one in Christ. Indeed “Jesus included women in his ministry and ministered to them in their distress” (Fitzmaurice, 1993, pp.10).

Whatever their view- religious, liberal, feminist, socialist, environmentalist, or humanist - women deserve to live within a liberated and vibrant society. This belief is reflected in the work of women's groups based on the principles of human rights. They may be the best organizations to lead the challenge against women's oppression (including domestic violence), to create a free, democratic and just society.

The question however remains, how far can they progress? Foley (2003) argues that Malaysian women's groups have been working to end all forms of violence against

women over the past two decades. However these groups still face some serious obstacles and contradictions, such as difficulties in overcoming entrenched social and cultural traditions that foster the conditions for violence against women. Despite the difficulties pointed out by Foley, hope lies in the assertiveness, on-going commitment and further development of the women's groups and other organizations that are passionate about these issues.

2.4 Patriarchal dominance

The issues about patriarchal dominance have been widely discussed. In this section, I first presented these issues from a global viewpoint, followed by the Malaysian perspective.

2.4.1 Global perspectives

Kemp (1998) argues that broad cultural and social factors contribute to the risk factors for violence against women. The key concept is patriarchy, a concept used to denote the male-dominated nature of so many different cultures. According to this perspective, a male abuser, 'socialized into the male role and position of dominance, feels entitled to control "his women" and uses battering, sex, psychological abuse, and economic resources to coerce and control her' (pp. 244).

Overviewing the magnitude of domestic violence and sexual violence against women globally, Garcia-Moreno (1999) confirms that violence experienced by women and girls comes primarily from men they know and in the context of families. In most cases violence is part of the continuum of controlling behaviour by a usually male partner or ex- partner over the women.

Similarly in New Zealand, a recent study on men who abused their partners recorded that the men believe that they have a right and entitlement to dominate their wives (Adams, Towns and Gavey 2005). There is little equality in patriarchal relationships. The male partner does not negotiate with the female partner.

The United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre (UNICEF, 2000) similarly pointed to complex and interconnected social and cultural factors that have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them. All of these are manifestations of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Factors contributing to these unequal power relations include: socio-economic forces, the family institution in which power relations are enforced, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of males, and legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status.

Since the 1970s, violence against women has shifted from being a 'private' issue, to being recognized as a public issue at the global level. As a result of feminist pressure, in 1980, the United Nations (UN) began to acknowledge and recognize violence against women as human rights violation (Hester, 2005).

2.4.2 Malaysian perspectives

In Malaysia, Ivy (2001) argued that from the very start of the evolution of the concept of rights as adopted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), women were invisible. This can be observed through the traditional beliefs and practices, the prejudices, the social norms and acceptance that are rampant in Malaysia. These have combined with economic and political interests to exclude women from prevailing definitions of general human rights and to relegate women to secondary or 'special interests' status within human rights considerations. Ivy further added that mainstream human rights as interpreted do not address the 'private sphere' where women are subject to violations (domestic violence, rape, confinement). Either the issues are exempted or they are hidden in the name of family, religion and culture. The widespread beliefs about the sanctity of the family unit within Malaysian society and the reluctance to undermine this stability are very evident (Foley, 2003). Thus women continue to be recognized and stereotyped only in terms of their relationships with others, as daughters, mothers, or wives.

The recognition that women are unable to claim their rights can be a very saddening scenario that emerges from history and social constructions in Malaysia. To some women, pursuing their right has become synonymous with struggle and activism. As asserted by Nora (1998), over the past several years women in Malaysia have seen a steady erosion of their freedom and rights in the areas of law and access to justice in the *Shariah* system, social rights in the family, public participation, and the socialization between sexes. Nora shows that women in Malaysia have come under tremendous pressure to conform to the dominant (Islamic) practice of what constitutes a good Muslim woman, in terms of her role as wife and mother, in terms of conduct and behaviour at home and in public.

Likewise, Heise (1994) identifies the cultural factors that perpetuate domestic violence in Malaysia. She refers to socio-cultural norms such as those that assert men's inherent superiority over women, gender-specific socialization, the notion of the family as being a private sphere under male control, and the acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict.

The embedded attitude in Malaysian society is that power is held by men and women are viewed as property (Foley, 2003, Putit, 2001, Ariffin, 1994; Yan, 1993). The women in this society are socially and politically controlled by men, thus leaving them oppressed. Social and political control is frequently manifested through male violence against women. As evident in the findings of some studies in the Malaysian context related to domestic violence, women are frightened of their husbands (Author Berita Harian, 2007; Jamayah et al., 2005; Putit, 2001; Rashidah, Rita and Schmitt, 1994). In Malaysian culture, the women continue to suffer in silence because they see domestic violence as a stigma and as bringing shame to the family. It takes a number of years experiencing abuse and a lot of courage for women to make domestic violence public (Jamayah et al., 2005; Putit 2001; WAO, 2000; Rashidah, Rita and Schmitt, 1994).

Inequality is enforced by the sexist structure of society and also by religious myth. (Badriyah, 2002; Kaur, Naidu, Noraini, Nordin, 2002). The report on "Monitoring the

fulfilment of the Malaysian Government's obligation to women's equality" (Kaur et. al., 2000) argued that discriminatory practices can be grouped in two broad areas. First, the prevailing societal attitudes which encompass cultural norms and practices as well as religious beliefs that are reflected within the institutions, and secondly the law itself that is discriminatory in substance in both Civil and *Shariah* law.

2.5 Islamic Religious Department and *Shariah* Court

The government's Islamic Religious Department and *Shariah* Court are two social institutions that symbolise the faith and social system of the Malay/Muslim community in Malaysia. The role of these institutions is to ensure that Islam is observed as the basis for the socio-economic and political order within the community. In addition, these institutions ensure that the Muslims uphold the religion as a way of life in their everyday actions, behaviour, and interpersonal, family and social relations based on the teaching of Islam. The following are the responsibilities of these institutions:

- Ensuring the community's adherence to Islamic laws and regulations
- Upholding the rights and responsibilities of women, men and children in the community
- Supporting human relationships within the existing social-cultural context
- Overcoming social problems faced by the Muslims in particular and the larger community in general
- Using the Islamic method in resolving problems within the community

Siti Hawa Ali (2000)

2.6 Marriage

In terms of marriage, there are two type of laws in Malaysia. The "Family Law" is for non Muslims, while the "*Shariah* Law" is for the Muslims. The following are the declarations in the family law and *Shariah* Law.

2.6.1 Marriage: Family Law

Cohabitation and same sex relationships are unacceptable and illegal in Malaysian culture. Malaysians believe that the family laws have to be put in place for the proper ordering of society (Ahmad, 1976). Couples aged eighteen or more who wish to live in a relationship need to be married and must be registered in accordance with the Family Law Act, 1976. Once a marriage is registered or deemed to be registered under the Family Law Act 1976, it will be a legal and binding monogamous marriage which will continue until one of the parties dies or a divorce is granted by a court. Neither party can marry again until the marriage is terminated by death or divorce. If during the continuance of such marriage, a party marries again, then he/she will be deemed to have committed the offence of bigamy under the Penal Code for which he/she may be liable to a fine and imprisonment of up to a maximum of seven years (Seng, 2000; Rasamani, 2001; Lawyerment, 2001; Lee, 2005). The subsequent marriage is also deemed null and void.

2.6.2 Marriage: *Shariah* Law

The *Shariah* Law is different from Family law. In *Shariah* law, polygamy is recognised, though not encouraged. Polygamy means a man is allowed to marry up to four wives under the Islamic Family Law Act 1984. Muslim theologians and masters of justice (religious edict) have interpreted the injunctions of Quran as allowing polygamy. However polygamy is not an unconditional right of every man but a responsibility to ensure the welfare and protection of widows and orphans, and to be allowed only if the man could “deal justly” with his wives. It is obvious that the Quran does not promote polygamy. The Quran, Verse 4:3 states that “if you fear that you will not be able to deal justly (with them [your wives]), then marry only one (Maznah, 1996; Maznah, 2000; Norani, 1997; Sisters in Islam, 1991). Noraini and Sisters in Islam (1991) further argued that not only does the Quran explicitly stress just conduct toward women and equal treatment between wives; it also recognizes the impossibility of living up to these ideals. Accordingly, it in effect advocates monogamy as the original and ideal state of marriage in Islam (4:3).

Before marrying a second or subsequent wife (maximum four), the husband must first make an application to the *Shariah* Court for permission. The conditions for granting this permission vary slightly in the 13 states in Malaysia. The conditions for polygamy vary from state to state according to its own *Shariah* law. Such differences have enabled errant men to circumvent the law to their own advantage.

2.6.3 Matrimonial offences

The Islamic family law in Malaysia defines several acts as matrimonial offences. The sanctions for each of these offences generally consist of fines or imprisonment or a combination of both. Offences that are important in relation to this study are the pronouncement of divorce outside the court, desertion of the wife, ill-treatment of the wife and a failure to give justice to the wife.

For the offence of pronouncing divorce outside the Court, section 124 of the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984 (Act 303) provides that any man who pronounces the *talaq* (divorce) in any form outside the Court and without the permission of the Court, commits a matrimonial offence and will be liable to a fine not exceeding RM1000³ or to punishment by imprisonment for a maximum period of six months, or both. This provision is a form of deterrence against the pervasive acts of Muslim husbands of pronouncing *talaq* impetuously during marital discord. It protects women against the arbitrary pronouncement of divorce by their husbands.

Husbands who leave their wives and do not carry out their responsibilities can be liable to a fine not exceeding RM1000 or imprisonment of not more than six months, or both (section 126 of Act 303). Deserted wives may also apply to the Court for an order that their husbands resume cohabitation with them (section 120).

Significant protection to wives experiencing matrimonial offence or violence at the hands of their husbands is provided for in sections 127 and 128 of Act 303. Section 127 states:

³ Exchange rate of RM1000 is equivalent to £630.00 at time of this report.

Any person who ill-treats his wife or cheats his wife of her property commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine not exceeding six months or with both such a fine and imprisonment.

Section 128 states:

Any person who fails to give proper justice to his wife according to Hukum Syara' (Islamic law) commits an offence and shall be punished with a fine not exceeding RM1000 or with imprisonment not exceeding six months or with both such a fine and imprisonment.

Noraida (2000b).

These provisions are potentially useful for the protection of women. However, they are underused especially by those experiencing abuse; either the women were not aware of its existence or for some women there is a fear of the adverse impact on the economic and social well being of the family. This may cause a reluctance on the part of the wife to make a complaint against her husband, compelling her to go through a reconciliatory process instead (Jamayah et al., 2005; Noraida, 2000; Rashidah et al., 1994).

The prosecution of a person in the *Shariah* Court for committing an offence over which the Court has jurisdiction must be preceded, at the initial stage, by information about the offence given to the Religious Enforcement Officer or a complaint about the offence to a *Shariah* Court judge. Muslim women who experience ill-treatment or injustice at the hands of their husbands will normally be advised to seek help at the Kadi's office. From interviews with the counsellors at the Kadi's office it can be ascertained that women were not briefed on the possible recourse in section 127 and 128. (Noraida, 2000a). The main focus of the process of providing help to women's grievances at the Kadi's Offices is reconciliation. Thus, many women are unaware of their options in the form of matrimonial penalties. (Noraida, 2000a).

2.6.4 Dissolution of marriage

According to the law of marriage in Malaysia, divorce is seen as an absolutely last resort. However, in certain circumstances it is the only solution to a complex marital conflict. In the cases of prolonged abusive relationships, for example, women are left with no other option to stop violence. This is supported by findings from various studies (Jamayah et al. 2005; Putit, 2001; Noraida, 2000b; Rashidah et al., 1994), where it was concluded that women in abusive relationships wait a number of years before seeking help. The reasons given are usually denial on the part of the wife that the marriage and relationship is breaking down, and the wife's inability to be independent and to seek matrimonial help. However, for many women enduring the violence while hoping for meaningful relationships with their husbands is inappropriate (Putit, 2001). Thus divorce and leaving the husband is the only recourse to eliminate the violence altogether.

Many Muslim women are still ignorant of the mechanisms available under the Malaysian *Shariah* law for the dissolution of marriage. While it is true that only the husband has the power to pronounce *talaq* (divorce) against a wife, there are several means by which the wife can seek orders for the court to dissolve her marriage. These include application for divorce by *talaq*, *ta'liq*, *khulu'*, *fasakh*. (Maznah, 1996). *Talaq* can be made under section 47 of Act 303 where the court shall advise the husband to pronounce *talaq* upon application of divorce by the wife.

Ta'liq means a wife may apply to the Court to order the dissolution of her marriage on the basis that one or more of the conditions agreed upon by the husband during the solemnization of their marriage has been breached or unfulfilled (section 50(1)(a) of Act 303).

Khulu' mechanism requires the Court to cause the husband to pronounce a divorce after a payment, agreed upon by the parties, has been paid by the wife to the husband. *Khulu'* may be allowed in a situation where a wife has come to dislike her husband and fears that she is unable to carry out her duty as a wife because of her dislike. (Act 303, section 49).

Fasakh refers to an order for the dissolution of marriage which the Court shall make on application by a wife and upon proof of specific and concrete grounds. *Fasakh* is ordered at the discretion of the Court and the consent and pronouncement of divorce on the part of the husband is not important (Act 303, section 52).

2.7 The Domestic Violence Act (DVA), 1996⁴

2.7.1 The Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia

Before the DVA was enacted in 1994, the legal measures available to domestic violence survivors were hampered by the reluctance of the police and justice agencies to enforce domestic violence as a criminal offence. Although criminal proceedings and injunctions were available under the Penal Code and existing legislation, domestic violence was regarded as a private family matter, and the police and the courts were generally unwilling to take action against the perpetrators (Amirthalingam, 2003; WAO, 2000b; WAO, 2002b; Ivy, 2001; Aneeta, 1996; Sisters In Islam, 1996). In addition the legal process was laborious and expensive. Even in the case when protection injunctions were issued, they often proved to be little more than pieces of paper which failed to protect women from their abusers.

In 1985 a Joint Action Group (JAG), that included five women's organizations and WAO (Women's Aid Organisations) trade union, university and consumers' association, Sisters in Islam and individual women, was set up to fight violence against women. JAG declared domestic violence to be a social concern and called for the enactment of a Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia. The JAG aggressively campaigned for eleven years before DVA was finally implemented on 1st June 1996.

Legislation contributes significantly to the process of combating domestic violence in Malaysia. The implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in 1996 was an important initial step. The Act not only defined the term domestic violence, but also the terms and the procedures relating to (i) Protection Orders, (ii) compensation and

⁴ The Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia was enacted in 1994, but was only been implemented in 1996.

counseling, (iii) procedure on protection orders, and (iv) the duties of enforcement officers dealing with domestic violence. According to the Domestic Violence Act 1994, domestic violence includes physical injury, sexual abuse, and also emotional and psychological abuse.

The Domestic Violence Act in Malaysia is an act to provide legal protection in situations of domestic violence and matters incidental thereto (Laws of Malaysia: Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act 521(1996)).

The act was enacted by ⁵*Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong* with the advice and consent of ⁶*Dewan Negara* and ⁷*Dewan Rakyat* assembled in parliament.

In section 2 the legislation defines the act of domestic violence as including the act of:

- Willfully or knowingly placing, or attempting to place, the victim in fear of physical injury
- Causing physical injury to the victim by such act which is known or ought to have been known would result in physical injury
- Compelling the victim by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the victim has a right to abstain. However a crucial limitation is that this does not include marital rape. This is because the DVA is attached to the Penal Code, which specifies that a woman does not have the right to abstain from sexual relations unless she is divorced, judicially separated, or has obtained a restraining order on her husband
- Confining or detaining the victim against the victim's will
- Causing mischief or destruction or damage to property with intent to cause or knowing that it is likely to cause distress or annoyance to the victim.

⁵ *Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong is the head of Malaysia's Political Power structure. He confirms the Prime Minister's election.*

⁶ *Dewan Negara: decision making, power to introduce and pass laws, approve bills*

⁷ *Dewan Rakyat: closely involved in defence, security, policy*

The court may make the following orders under section 6(1) to be included in the protection order:-

- Granting the right of exclusive occupation to a protected person of a shared residence by excluding the offender
- Prohibiting the offender from entering the victim's residence, place of employment, or school, or from making personal contact
- Requiring the offender to allow the victim to enter the offender's premise to collect personal belongings
- Allowing the victim continued use of a vehicle which the victim previously used and
- Requiring the offender to refrain from making written or telephone communication with any protected person

Aneeta (1999)

The court may, in appropriate circumstances, attach a power of arrest to a protection order (whether interim or otherwise) which means that a police officer may arrest without warrant the person against whom the order is made if he is in breach of the order.

“The penalty for contravening a protection order is a fine not exceeding RM2000.00 or a term of imprisonment not exceeding six months or both. If the order is contravened by the use of violence on the protected person, the penalty increases to a fine not exceeding RM4000.00 or a term of imprisonment not exceeding one year or both” (Aneeta, 1999).

2.7.2 Who is protected by the Domestic Violence Act?

The DVA defines domestic violence as an act by a person towards:

- his or her spouse;
- his or her former spouse;
- a child;
- an incapacitated adult; or
- any other member of the family.

(Section 1, Laws of Malaysia: Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act 521), (1996)

Spouse refers to “.....a person who has gone through a form of ceremony which is recognized as a marriage ceremony according to the religion or custom of the parties concerned, notwithstanding that such a ceremony is not registered”. (Section 2, Laws of Malaysia : Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act 521), (1996)

Child means a person below the age of eighteen years who is living as a member of the offender’s family or of the family of the offender’s spouse or former spouse, as the case may be. (Section 1, Laws of Malaysia: Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act 521), (1996)

Incapacitated adult means a person who is wholly or partially incapacitated or infirm, by reason of physical or mental disability or ill-health or old age, who is living as a member of the offender’s family. (Section 2, Laws of Malaysia: Domestic Violence Act 1994, Act 521), (1996)

2.7.3 How effective is the Domestic Violence Act?

This section is largely based on WAO’s (2000) report on their studies on the experiences of battered [abused] women post-DVA in relation to monitoring the implementation of the DVA since 1996. The combination and the intertwining of the following issues affect the content and effectiveness of DVA.

- Differences in the interpretation of the law
- The influence of culture
- The lack of gender sensitivity of the implementing authorities

Cultural influences effect not only the content of the law but also how the law is enforced. A patriarchal system continues to assign women to a lower position in the family, society, and before the law. The law does not perceive women as autonomous individuals capable of making decisions appropriate to their own lives.

If members of society do not respect or understand the law - including those individuals responsible for the law's enforcement and lack of operational know-how by implementing agencies - the objectives set forth by the law will not be achieved.

WAO further elaborated on some critical areas of concern voiced by battered women who sought protection from violence through DVA. Among these are the following:

- The difficulties experienced by women who are seeking legal protection where there are no signs of physical violence
- The complicated and long - drawn out process of obtaining protection orders, ranging from two days to over four months. Yet the period of time between the registering of a complaint and the court hearing is often the most dangerous and frightening for women

Women's organizations acknowledge that the DVA is not as far reaching as was originally intended because concessions and limitations were agreed upon in order for the DVA to be finally implemented. While WAO argued that the implementation of this Act is a monumental achievement, it will need to be revisited and strengthened if it is more effectively to protect women's rights.

Some women remain unfamiliar with the implementation of DVA. One of the victims quoted by the WAO is worth attention:

"As a long-time patient survivor of domestic violence, may I make some very basic suggestions: Please:

- inform us of police procedure with regards to what happens from the time we file a police report, to the time when and if a case is called to court
- inform us of any conditions that might disqualify us from filing a case under the DVA or cause a delay in the proceedings
- educate us on how to apply directly for a quick restraining order that can protect us while the police may require a long time to complete investigations and paper work

- educate the police and hospitals that the psychological fear, shame and trauma that a human being experiences when he/she is repeatedly beaten may not be visible but is much more damaging than the visible injuries he/she may sustain”

The above quotation reveals that there are obvious shortcomings within the implementation of the DVA. Women are not familiar with the mechanism of DVA and do not understand how and what procedure to follow when they need help in the event of domestic violence. The women called for the police and the medical team to understand and be sensitive to the psychological trauma caused by domestic violence. The abuse can have permanent and visible wounds, the severity and the repetition of violence clearly increase the women’s psychological trauma, fear and shame. The above excerpt might be only an example of one woman’s expression, but it symbolizes many women’s uncertainty of how ‘the supposed others’ could be of help in the event of domestic violence. The women need practical support and guidance from the implementers of DVA. It should be noted that the DVA does not interact with *shariah* law (Noraida, 2000a, 200b).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief background to marriage and society in Malaysia. It explored the demographics of Malaysia so as to gain insight into the study context. It discussed marriage and the law and argued how women are being oppressed. Such political and socio-cultural factors enhanced by religious myth and patriarchal practices drive women to the edge. The initiatives of some groups working against domestic violence such as the Joint Action Group (JAG), which includes five women’s organizations and WAO, trade union, university and consumers’ association and Sisters in Islam have created pressure in order to improve women’s right issues and practices. The chapter has also draws attention to the Domestic Violence Act, Malaysia, which was implemented in 1996. It discussed how its implementation is much affected by the influence of culture, the differences in the interpretation of the law and the lack of gender sensitivity within the implementing authorities. This leads

to the review of international literature on women and domestic violence that will be presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 Literature Review: Domestic Violence and Refuges

3.1 Introduction

This literature review chapter comprises two sections. The first section focuses on issues of domestic violence in Malaysia. It discusses the statistics of domestic violence in Malaysia, followed by studies on domestic violence. Next it examines the studies on refuges in Malaysia. Subsequently, it presents evidence about the emergence of refuges in Malaysia.

The second section looks at refuges in other parts of the world. This is followed by an examination of studies of women and children in refuges in North America and the UK. Finally, I provide brief history of refuges in UK.

3.2 Domestic violence in Malaysia

Literature on domestic violence in Malaysia is relatively limited. This may signal a small amount of research itself or perhaps that there were studies done but not published. Therefore, this review of literature in the Malaysian context is much shorter than a review of comparable literature in the West.

3.2.1 Statistics

It is well documented that figures reporting domestic violence represent merely the 'tip of the iceberg' (Rashidah, Rita and Schmitt, 1994; Putit, 2001; Jamayah et al., 2005). This is similar in most parts of the world (Taylor, 1999; WHO, 2000; Mooney, 2000; Hague and Malos, 2005; Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1998; Feminist.com report, 1995-2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1980). In fact the British Crime Survey (2000) estimated that just under 1/3 of incidents were reported (British Crime Survey England and Wales, 2000; Abrahams 2001). In Malaysia, Rashidah et al., (1994) reported that at present, there are no official national statistics on domestic violence in Malaysia. However, police departments, hospitals, and welfare organizations do collect some separate data. Police Headquarters, Bukit Aman, Malaysia reported 3468 cases in 2000, 3107 in 2001 and 1644 in 2002. The domestic violence cases reported appear to be declining. However, this decline does not

necessarily indicate a fall in the incidence of cases – it could instead be due to other reasons, including a decline in reporting itself.

3.2.2 Studies of domestic violence in Malaysia

One study in West Malaysia on the prevalence, problems and public attitudes to violence against women was carried out by Rashidah, Rita and Schmitt (1994). Samples included abused women, police, hospitals, judicial departments and court, the welfare and social department, and women's organizations. Data was collected through all agencies involved, interviews and case analysis from WAO refuge residents (1991-1992). The researcher reported that it was impossible to report the correct prevalence of domestic violence in Malaysia. They found that only the police, welfare and social department, and some judicial department have statistics on domestic violence (violence against women). Even then, such departments were not keen to record domestic violence cases. This led to cases of domestic violence being under-reported. Their survey indicated that 1.8 million women were abused by their husband or boyfriend in 1989, yet only 909 cases were recorded by the police. It implied that only 0.05 % cases had been reported to the police.

The accounts of the women in the study revealed various factors for the low reporting of cases. These included domestic violence being seen as a social stigma, not being aware of domestic violence as a crime, fear that the abuser will become more violent when reported, no family or social support, and the belief that the police and the law are not keen to help or assist in domestic violence events. These speculations were supported by other participants in this study, i.e the survey through random sampling of males and females in West Malaysia in 1990. Only 22% of the participants believed that domestic violence should be reported to the police as it was considered as a 'private family issue', and not a problem of society.

Rashidah et al. reported that 15% of the 1221 respondents claimed that it is acceptable for men to hit their wives if they failed to carry their duties in the home. The following variables were considered to be misconduct for women and therefore

acceptable reasons to abuse a wife. The percentage denotes the respondents believing that women deserve to be beaten for the particular reason.

- infidelity (72%)
- not obedient to the husband (58%)
- refusal to have sex (4%)
- refusal to follow religious teaching and laws (3%)
- refusal to do house-chores (3%)
- out of the home without the husband's consent (3%)
- extravagance (2%)
- appearing dominant towards the husband; including nagging, being stubborn or uncooperative, hitting children, arguing, showing disrespect, gambling and failing to look after the family's welfare (1% of each)

Another study done by Jamayah, Napsiah, Zabidah, Elicebat (2005) on male partners' violence against women was done in Kuching city and Sibu and Miri towns in Sarawak (East Malaysia). Indepth interviews were carried out with 94 abused women. The women believed the following reasons justified or caused their male partners to act violently in the home.

- hot temper (17.73)
- personality traits other than hot temper (84%)
- unfaithfulness to partner (55%) [extra marital affair]
- financial problems (51%)
- drug abuse and alcoholism (9.22%)
- gambling and telling lies (22.7%)
- Other factors such as being late in preparing the meal, forced sex (0.7%).

The type of abuse ranged from verbal, emotional, financial and physical to sexual abuse. 40.4% of the participants stated that the abuse had intensified and increased in occurrence over the years. Despite this, the women responded by keeping quiet

(48%). Only 23% fought back, while 15% ran to their family and friends or community leader. The study reported that only 14% reported to official agencies.

The 48% who preferred keeping quiet explained this with various reasons, including shame, dishonor, love, and wanting to 'keep the family together'. Some participants also believed that it is 'normal' to 'quarrel' in a family. 43% of the women continued to stay with the abuser for reasons of love for their men and also because of their children. Others talked about family 'dignity', having nowhere to stay, family and societal pressure and financial reasons. It was further reported that 93.3% of these women continued to be abused by their husbands.

At the time of the study, Jamayah et al. reported that 57% of those who did not decide to keep quiet left the abuser for fear of their safety. Some left home and separated from their husband and some divorced. 31% of the women who left mentioned that they had had enough of the abuse. The meaning of the term 'enough' differed amongst the participants: it may imply years or decades. 80% of the women who left the abusive husband/partner stayed with their family members. Others ran to their friends (7%), rented a place (6%), bought their own house (5%), and got help from an employer (2%). A small number sought help at the One Stop Crisis Centre (OSCC) for emergency and temporary accommodation for a day or two.

Fifty-nine percent of those women who sought help from various agencies were satisfied with the services provided by government and non - government officials. Others expressed their disappointment. Some women were disappointed when they were asked to go for counselling first before their divorce applications could be processed. It is because divorce is only a last resort in *Shariah* law. Some women were disheartened when no action was taken by the police or it took a long time for necessary action to be taken. Worst was when the women had to wait a long time for an appointment with the agencies.

Putit's (2001) phenomenological-hermeneutics studies on abused women at the One Stop Crisis Centre in Kuching, Malaysia highlighted that the fact that silence and the

taboo nature of domestic violence in Malaysia contributes significantly to the prolonged and invisible nature of the abuse that is happening in the home. It is a socially constructed behavioural norm, deeply rooted in a society that strongly believes that this issue is in the private sphere. The women's safety, physical, mental and emotional, was threatened by these cultural beliefs. Putit highlighted the serious impact of violence on the women and described this damage as 'eroding the women's being', their self esteem and confidence, identity, emotion, and their social skills. The damaging effect prevailed as long as their abusive relationship continued. The study's primary focus was on the health and support services. Putit called for society to understand the existential impact of male partner abuse on women in Malaysia, and the need for a holistic response to help the women.

There is a related study by WAO (2000a) in Malaysia, *Single Mothers' Needs Assessment Survey: Survivors of Domestic Violence*. The report, on housing needs, revealed that of the 25 women surveyed, 68% of the respondents rented their house, 12% lived with their families and 12% lived in housing provided by their employer. Only one woman owned her home (inherited from her father), and one lived in low cost housing. One-third of these women lived in squatter areas; often in poor sanitary conditions, as they couldn't afford to rent a flat that offered reasonably good sanitation and facilities.

3.3 Studies of refuges in Malaysia

The first refuge in Malaysia was established in 1982. Since then, there has been no comprehensive research on women in refuges. There has been little discussion about the complex process of practical and emotional support for the women who have left an abusive relationship. There has been a reluctance to trace the journey of these women while in the refuge and their life after refuge.

A web search revealed only one published article that focused on WAO services from 1982-2001, reported by Ivy (2001). Ivy described how the refuge started as a shelter and offered counselling for abused women. Later Ivy presented the objectives and

philosophy of the refuge. She reported about public funding and the ongoing task of fundraising. She presented the statistics from 1982 to 2001.

However, Ivy's (2001) articles did not report whether the refuge met the needs of the women who have left situations of domestic violence. Nor did it look into the workers' perspectives; how prepared women were for leaving the refuge or the follow-up needed. Neither was there any report providing factors that enhance or detract from WAO's principles and values.

Statistics show the high prevalence of domestic violence in Malaysia and the fact that many abused women have nowhere to turn to. This research project attempted to fill in the gap. This study then is much overdue in its examination of the refuges and their work. It will offer critical reflection and examination of intervention relating to domestic violence in the Malaysian scenario.

Exploring the support of the two refuges that I named⁸ as refuge 1 [1982 and ongoing] and refuge 2 [since 1997 and ongoing] may provide answers to some questions and speculation regarding the issues involved. Listening to women in refuge has led to a better understanding of the women's experiences, concurrently providing knowledge and an evidence base relating to their supports, needs and difficulties. For the women, hopefully the findings will result in a better understanding of the delivery of support and help.

3.4 Emergence of refuges in Malaysia

The emergence of refuges in Malaysia began in 1982. After two decades, there were still only six recorded refuges: two in Kuala Lumpur, two in Selangor, one in Penang and one in Negri Sembilan. From informal verbal sources, there are some new refuges being established but there seems to be no firm reports available.

⁸ To ensure confidentiality I named the refuges of my study as refuge 1 and refuge 2. Also to allow comparison to be made.

When WAO first established a refuge in Malaysia in 1982, public resistance was strongly felt (Foley, 2003). Ivy, 2002 explained that the refuge was opened amidst widespread opinion that violence against women was a private family matter not needing to be interfered with the public. There were hopes that women will not leave their homes. There were speculations that there weren't many instances of wife beating.

Its staff faced suspicion and threat. The interference in 'private family life' by the work of the refuge was seen as destabilising the institution of marriage, and it was feared that family life would suffer.

However, after 20 years, the Women's Aid Organisation, Malaysia (WAO) remains persistent about providing refuge for women survivors. Ivy reported that in 2001, WAO provided shelter to 115 women, and 145 children, responded to 1063 telephone counselling calls, and provided 50 face to face counselling sessions, legal advice and other services, including assistance in job placements and housing and public education programs about domestic violence. WAO work was based on the following principles:

- Believing in and accepting the client's story
- Addressing her concerns and providing options from which she can choose
- Working with a woman at her own pace in assessing and changing her situation
- Recognising a woman's talents, skills and experience and reminding her that she is a survivor
- Recognising that women can have control over their lives
- Confidentiality is assured, no information to be given to anyone outside the agency without her informed and expressed consent
- Treating all women with respect and dignity regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, age, class, religion, or sexual orientation
- Non-judgemental approach

- Recognising the children's need for safety and a loving environment free from violence
- Recognising that WAO is not in a position to provide counselling to batterers but can direct them to other service providers

Ivy (2002, pp22)

There are also designated government shelters under the Welfare Department, Ministry of National Unity and Social Development that accommodate women who experience domestic violence and others who may be homeless, run away from home etc. These government shelters are not exclusively for domestic violence survivors (Ivy, 2002). In East Malaysia, there is no refuge. Kaur, Naidu, Noraini and Nordin (2002) reported that the Welfare Department has not designated any government institutions to provide shelter solely for survivors of domestic violence. In addition, there is a shortage of welfare officers to handle domestic violence cases. The women survivors of domestic violence who seek shelters will be accommodated in orphanages, homes for juvenile delinquents and homes for the elderly. At the time of reporting there were 48 welfare institutions in Malaysia. Apparently, these shelters have no resources for supporting the women survivors of domestic violence. This shelter only caters to its resident's basic needs such as accommodations and meals, unlike refuges that have various programmes and activities besides providing basic needs.

3.5 Refuges in other parts of the world

It has been recognized that refuges used different approaches depending on its community's beliefs and acceptance. Not all refuges are operated by feminist groups espousing the principle of self-determination, but many of them are (Dobash and Dobash, 1980). Refuges exist in the UK, United States, Holland, West Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Belgium, Canada, France, Australia and New Zealand (Dobash and Dobash, 1980) and many other parts of the world where they are not so well documented.

However, refuges are considered inappropriate in some non-western countries, for example in China (Hester, 2000). Hester reported that The All China Women's Federation, as well as the Communist Party, has argued that refuges could partly be responsible for breaking up the family, and therefore do not agree to the establishment of refuges. Instead, the emphasis was on the use of the service of the community organizations and mediation. The women were advised to seek accommodation from families or other relatives. Hester further elaborated that there have been a few attempts to set up a refuge in the Wuhan city and in Beijing but neither refuge survived because of a lack of formal support, political and economical. This argument appears similar to the Malaysian scenario.

Women in Wafe, Papua New Guinea, Garifuana women in Latin America, the women in Ecuador, the Nagovisi in the Solomon Island, the !Kung in South Africa, have formed community and neighbourhood level groups of women for economic solidarity and solidarity against men who batter. Counts, Brown and Campbell (1992) produced a brief overview of the mechanisms used by societies to limit the harm done by wife beating. However, there seems to be no mention of refuge, instead the willingness of the women's kin to support her is the main factor in the mechanisms.

3.6 Studies of women and children in North America and the UK

3.6.1 Introduction

Refuges that were first established in the 1970's in UK and USA, followed by Canada, Australia and most countries in Europe were designed to provide safety, and support. They were part of social movement which help to develop empowerment in women. The refuges continue to provide a vital service, emergency and temporary housing to a large number of women and children fleeing domestic violence. Sometimes there is conflict for the refuge in providing physical support and being part of the social movement (Stark, 2007).

Since the work of refuges is largely undocumented except during the 1970s/80s (Abrahams, 2004), I will discuss these few studies along with available literature on

work supporting abused women. We can learn about the abused women's needs regardless of whether the study was done in a refuge or not.

Qualitative work on accounts by survivors highlights the fact that, in the majority of cases, refuges are the only agencies that women believe can offer them safety. Refuges are consistently rated more positively than other agencies by survivors (Mullender & Hague, 2001). This research project reported that "women's refuge and outreach projects had the best practical record in terms of consulting women and children using their services" (Hague and Mullender, 2005, pp.153).

3.6.2 Studies and works on women and children

Several studies on domestic violence and refuges for battered women respect the efforts the women have made to understand their difficulties and to help themselves (Pahl 1978; Pahl 1985; Johnston 1985; Binney, Harkell and Nixon 1988; Victim Support 1992; Humphreys, Hester, Hague, Mullender, Abrahams and Lowe 2000; Harwin and Barron, Hague and Malos 2005; Hague, Mullender and Aris 2003; Abrahams 2004).

Earlier research on refuges and housing for battered women was done by the Women's Aid Federation (England) and Department of the Environment research team (Binney, Harkell and Nixon, 1981). The study examined the work of the refuges in providing for short-term needs and also investigated the long-term housing needs of battered women and their children in England and Wales. The research was carried out in two stages: a national survey of all refuges in England and Wales and the women living in the refuges; and a follow-up study 18 months later of a sample of women interviewed in the national survey. Altogether, there were 139 groups running refuges, and 636 women participated in the study.

The women's accounts valued their refuge experience highly for the help and support provided. The study reported that women gained confidence and there were improvements in mental and physical health. This was not available in hostels, bed and breakfast or in any other form of emergency accommodation. The Housing Act

1977 had improved women's chances of finding permanent accommodation. The lobbying of councils by Women's Aid groups played an important part in eventually ensuring that some of these women were re-housed. Because of the limited supply of private rented or housing association property available some had to endure long periods in emergency accommodation while some had to return to their violent partner.

Binney, Harkell and Nixon (1981) reported that many women who began living alone with their children in the new community expressed their worrying and lonely experience at first. However, some who were re-housed near the refuge or friends could share child care and social life. Many of the women in the follow-up study were in poverty. They were dependant on social security as most couldn't work because they had small children. Some women continued to be harassed by their ex-partners after they left the refuge. Women's Aid groups tried to provide some form of follow-up contact, but lack of resources severely restricted the amount of follow-up work.

A qualitative, longitudinal study over a four-year span was also carried out in a Women's Aid refuge in the UK (Pahl 1985). Forty two women participated in the study. They were interviewed while they were staying in the refuge and after they left, and were re-interviewed an average of two years later. The study concluded that the refuges made their own contribution to strengthening the position of women both individually and collectively. Many women felt that they had changed during their stay at the refuge, gaining in strength, confidence and control over their lives. Taking part in decision making while at the refuge was a very positive aspect of refuge life. The refuge enhanced the process of transition to life as a one-parent family and provided support thereafter. The women stressed that they enjoyed the peace of mind when leaving violent and dangerous men. The women in the study also spoke of their satisfaction in being in control of their own money.

Humphreys, Hester, Hague, Mullender, Abrahams and Lowe (2000) examined the range and extent of service provision for families related to the incidence of domestic

violence throughout the UK. Their study reported that the refuges offer a wide range of support and advocacy services, safe emergency accommodation, child care and family welfare. The refuges also provide outreach projects and local telephone advice lines. The Women's Aid and other women's support, advocacy and outreach services form a national network across the UK. Despite inadequate resources these refuges demonstrated good practice.

The most recent study of refuges in the UK was carried out in Penzance, Birmingham and York in collaboration with Women's Aid groups (Abrahams 2004). The study involved 23 current and past residents and 23 workers. The findings indicated a dynamic process of loss, transition and recovery, similar to that experienced following bereavement. The consistent pattern of needs and support for the women extend from entry into the refuge until some time after they leave.

Abrahams used Maslow's theory of human need (1987) in discussing the needs and support required by these women. These were described in three broad phases that included reception (arriving at refuge), recognition/re-alignment (change) and reinvestment (back in society). Many women (re)gain self-reliance and experience feelings of personal change during their time at a centre through practical and emotional support such as advocacy, information and advice, national and local helplines, website and potential access, outreach and community refuge provision. Continued support after women leave the home/refuge is important. This can involve individual accommodation and outreach support work.

Some studies on women and children that extend beyond life in the refuge are also worth examining. The Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) in the UK aims to develop and implement local strategies to reduce domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. A study associated with this reported that, for women who are experiencing violence but not actively seeking help the following approaches are needed (Hester and Westmarland, 2005).

- Publicity campaigns emphasizing that domestic violence is a crime. This should be done through media, radio, television, posters and stickers

- Outline enquiry help through health and other practitioners
- Outreach programmes, through advocates or outreach workers
- Supporting women to report to the police. This includes legal support and close links with the police

Women who experience repeat victimisation and are actively seeking help, needed the following approaches:

- Publicity campaigns
- Outreach
- Advocacy and support – pro-active, holistic and comprehensive, and preferably based in a one-stop-shop
- Supporting women to engage with the criminal and civil justice systems
Advocacy to include legal, emotional support, and close links with the police, CPS and family law solicitors
- Regular risk assessment
- Group work to deal with emotional issues and meet other women with similar experiences. A structural approach at least 10 weeks in length

Hague and Malos (2005) were particularly concerned with housing issues. They found that women were empowered when they gained access to information, after years of thinking that there was no way out, and when they were assisted to make use of the services available in other areas. Self-help, self determination and empowerment for women and children form important foundations underlying all refuge work (Abrahams, 2004; Hague and Malos, 2005; Humphreys, Hester, Hague, Mullender, Abrahams and Lowe, 2000; Harwin and Barron, 2000, Pennell, 1987). The values and principles of Women's Aid in the UK emphasise the importance of abused women becoming more powerful on a personal and psychological level to develop the strength and emotional resources to break away from or to change violent relationships.

Harris, Stickney, Grasley, Hutchinson, and Boyd's (2001) study in London, Ontario Canada interviewed 105 women who were abused and described their experiences in

searching for help. The women were asked about their interaction with different services that comprise the formal help network and coordinated response. The study reported that the women wanted assistance such as protection, safe shelter, removal of their abusive partners, advice about managing their situations, criminal charges brought against their partners, and medical care for their injuries. The study also reported that the women often look to friends and family for support. Their own resourcefulness cannot be underestimated. This includes self directed learning, reading and reaching out to a combination of services within the criminal justice, health care, and social service systems. Harris et al. further asserted that the services are responsible for creating and maintaining readily accessible, up-to-date information on local agencies including information on how they can help. In UK, online information about available refuge places are found in UKrefugeonline and the list of domestic violence services in Gold Book. This emphasizes the responsibility of service providers to be knowledgeable about sources of help. A smooth flow of communication between service providers and help seekers is essential. Community contacts for the women are extremely important. Harris et al. also affirmed the importance of coordinated response and an integrated model of community service in helping the women.

As in any work on abused women Hoff (1990) recognized that the challenge is to balance a woman's need for support and material aid during crisis with her need for emotional, social, and physical space so that she may once again experience herself as being in charge of her life. Hoff's (1990) study analyses abused women in urban USA in a life history perspective. The study involved 9 battered women, 131 social network members plus 3 other battered women who acted as methodological consultants. This study reported the complex relationships between individual women, their social networks, and the larger society. The practice implications as discussed by Hoff (1990) are summarized as follows:

- Consciousness-raising and public education
- Establishment of holding/counselling centres for violent assailants rather than victims. Education and political action to enforce Abuse Prevention Laws so that victims are not forced out of the homes

- Examination of practice regarding violent persons whose behavior crosses over between the mental health and criminal justice systems
- Consciousness raising for men and women – sex role
- Social and political action to change current social arrangements around parenting
- Examination of the language of everyday life, of social theory, and the practice of research for their relevance to the topic of violence against women
- Formation of individual consciousness toward egalitarian ideology about the nature and role of women as a prelude to social and political action to redefine and change oppressive social arrangements
- Training for health and human service professionals to increase skills in assisting women in crisis around battering
- Development of education programmes, peer support groups, and ‘contemporary rites of passage’ for battered women

Other activists, researchers and writers on domestic violence emphasized the importance of listening to the women’s voices. Hague, Mullender and Aris (2003) emphasized that:

“hearing the women’s voices in respect of policy and practice is just as important as hearing them in relation to original abuse” (pp.39).

Hague et al. further asserted that failure to do so can lead to equally inappropriate responses in both cases. They argued that:

“from many structuralist, socialist and standpoint approaches, postmodernism and post-structuralism have particularly emphasised that knowledge is historically and culturally specific and that we must listen to the voices of individuals previously silenced by dominant discourses if we are to understand and work with them” (pp.39).

We need to ‘get inside’ and find out what works better for the women.

Similarly, Lawless (2001) talked about the power of story telling and the importance of listening to the women. Lawless emphasized the act of speaking and act of

listening, and acknowledge that we are there in the gap in our knowledge of domestic violence. Hague et al. and Lawless reported that listening to the women with dignity and respect, without being judgmental and promoting their needs and views is empowering and enhances survivors' involvement strategies. Hague et. al. further argued that strategic consultation and involvement of abused women in the official part of legislation can be acted upon in a practical way. For example through the "1998 Crime and Disorder Act, Crime and Disorder Partnership, Best Value, Supporting People, Local Government Act 2000", (pp.92) which could lead to policy and service development. Hague et al. stated that the Westminster Domestic Violence Forum is a model of good practice.

The above discussion projected overall help that could be rendered to the abused women and their children not only in the refuge but in society as a whole. The discussion ends with the importance of listening to the women's voices and getting them involved in a practical way. To remain close to my research study about the refuges of Malaysia, what follows is the brief history of refuges in UK

3.7 Brief history of refuges in the UK

It is important to learn how refuges have developed in the UK. Shelter was known to be first established in England (Hague and Malos, 1995, 2005; Dobash and Dobash 1980, 2002). These authors reported that the process to establish refuges in UK was deliberate and laboured.

Before the 1970s there was public silence, embarrassment and shame about violence in the home (Hague and Malos, 2005). The women endured the maltreatment and pain and had no one to turn to. Practically, there was no service and support provision, and little support from the police who also traditionally regarded the home as haven, and domestic violence as private.

In the late 60s and early 70s the public attitude began to change leading to the Women's Liberation movement that was established in various western countries. It stirred up the women's awareness of being oppressed and exploited within a male dominated society. It began with a group of women meeting together to share their

lives and experiences and discuss plans for local action. (Hague and Malos, 2005; Dobash and Dobash, 1980). In 1972 the first refuge at Chiswick Women's Aid was established (Dobash and Dobash, 1980). The group, spearheaded by Erin Pizzey, put the oppression and exploitation of women on the public agenda. The group remarkably gained substantial media attention and helped to put pressure on politicians and agencies to react to the problem.

By 1974, 40 other refuges began to open. In the first national meeting of Women's Aid, 1974, held in London, major dissimilarity emerged between the groups espousing Pizzey's theories and those supporting the aims and principles of the Women's Liberation Movement.

“The women who began to work on wife abuse were primarily feminists and members of the women's liberation groups who acted pragmatically to assist women by providing them with a reasonably secure refuge” (Dobash and Dobash, 1980, pp.223).

This led to the establishment of the National Women's Aid Federation (NWAFF) that developed throughout 1974-1975 (Hague and Malos 2005, Dobash and Dobash 1980). This has now formed four national federations that share the same philosophy. These services are co-coordinated through Northern Ireland Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Aid, Welsh Women's Aid and the Women's Aid Federation of England (Humphreys et. al., 2000).

The majority of the refuges in the UK are affiliated to one of the Women's Aid Federations, or work closely with them, including those that provide refuges specifically for women of different cultural backgrounds. Women's Aid has been the key agency for women who have experienced domestic violence, and for their children (Hague and Malos, 2001; Harwin and Barron, 2000). Other refuges exist outside of this framework, run by the church or other religious groups, housing associations, charitable organizations and local authorities. These refuges were identified as more traditional social provision agencies. They may be similar in some respects to those run by Women's Aid groups, but feel unable to accept and work within the feminist orientation. Others may have different ideologies, procedures and

systems. However, they all provide options for women escaping domestic violence. The Women's Aid federations have continued this work in the 1990s and 2000s providing not only refuges but also support and outreach throughout the UK. Women's Aid represents and coordinates the growing network of domestic violence services, and lobbying and campaigning for legal and policy measures and for comprehensive provision to meet the needs of abused women and children (Hague and Malos, 2005).

There are now more than 500 local domestic violence services affiliated to the Women's Aid group. More than 70,000 women and children are sheltered annually. In addition, over 100,000 women contact the Women's Aid Federations and their member refuge groups for advice and help annually (Hague and Malos, 2005; Humphreys et al., 2000).

WAFE (Women's Aid Federation, England) works towards the following aims.

- "Empower women who have been affected by domestic violence
- Meet the needs of children affected by domestic violence
- Provide services run by women which are based on listening to survivors
- Challenge the disadvantages which result from domestic violence
- Support and reflect diversity and promote equality of opportunity
- Promote cohesive inter-agency responses to domestic violence and develop partnerships"

(Women's Aid Federation, England, 2008)

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed domestic violence in Malaysia and have presented statistics indicating the under-reported cases of domestic violence. There were relatively small amounts of published research on domestic violence suggesting that much work still needs to be done. To remain close to this study, this chapter also examines the emergence of refuges which only exist in West Malaysia. There were some designated government shelters that are not exclusively designed to

accommodate abused women and are not resourceful in helping and supporting these women.

This chapter has also identified various approaches used in other parts of the world to support women. Different approaches were used by different communities; some form community organisations and are based on solidarity against perpetrators, while others encourage family or other relatives to support the women.

The later sections of this chapter examined the studies on women and children in North America and UK, followed by a brief history of refuges in UK.

In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

The chapter discusses ways of understanding abused women and sets this in context. The theoretical framework draws on the ‘human ecological system’ developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2001, 2005). Further, drawing from the ‘model of needs and support’ by Hester and Westmarland (2004), I have developed the ‘Women in Crisis - Three Stages Intervention’ model. This chapter then expands on the application of this model by reviewing literature on helping women while in crisis, while the women are in the refuge and support after refuge,.

4.2 Understanding women and context

The works of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2001, 2005) on the human ecological system had a powerful effect on the way I organised my thought about my study on domestic violence in the Malaysian context. However as I progressed with my analysis, I found that the models of “needs and support” developed by Hester and Westmarland (2004) became more appropriate in understanding some of the processes the women were experiencing and the related context. The model also influenced me in developing intervention strategies for the women while in the refuge. I did not structure my thesis using the human ecological system as my work was about the women’s experiences and their needs and process that differed with context and time. However the ecological system theory was still helpful as my discussion chapter came to a close for the refuge can be seen as part of the eco-system that Bronfenbrenner outlines. Questions of what happened to the women when they return to the community, either returning to husband/partner or in a new home and new community, became another part of the system. I saw the women positioned within the society. I saw the potential/actual strategies used at various levels by the society, in helping women, and finally I developed the ‘Women in Crisis - 3 Stages Interventions’ as its framework.

4.3 Ecological System theory (Interconnectedness between people and environment)

Human ecology concerns the study of human-environment relations, the relation in which two interdependent systems reciprocally interact. Bronfenbrenner focuses on child development in the child's ecological context. The key to Bronfenbrenner's theory is the interaction of structures within the layers of a system; the micro-, exo- and the macro-system.

He described the *microsystem* as the setting within which the child is behaving at the given moment in his or her life, for example the parents, relatives, teachers, close friends, mentors, spouses or others who participate in the life of the developing person on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. In turn, the *mesosystem* is the set of microsystems constituting the individual's developmental niche within a given period of development: it is the interactions between the major settings that include the developing person at a particular point in his or her life (Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2001, 2005).

The *exosystem* comprised of contexts that, while not directly involving the developing person (eg, parent's workplace), have an influence on a person's behaviour and development (e.g., as may occur when the parent has had a stressful day at work and as a result is less able to provide quality care-giving to the child).

Finally, the *macrosystem* influences the nature of interactions within all other levels of the ecology of human development. Bronfenbrenner recognized that his theory would be incomplete unless he included in his levels of individual structure and function (biology, psychology, and behaviour), a description of how they fused dynamically with the ecological systems he described. He concludes that, the reason why children from one or another subcultural group may develop in a particular way is to be found in the character of micro-, meso-, and exo-systems that are operative for that particular subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The macrosystem has a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers.

In this study, I adapt the ecological system to focus on women (see page 215 for further illustration). A woman is situated in the microsystem, the innermost layer. The outer layers i.e the meso and exo comprise different aspects of the woman's community and society. It is indeed a complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving woman and her immediate external environment. We can view this individual woman within the context of the broader system i.e. the family, community and society. The multiple factors that create domestic violence and pressure woman to survive can be analysed from her ecological system. It is the exploration and the understanding of the particular ecological context, the micro and the macro context and its meaning to the woman that is important. The way in which the micro, exo and macro-system influences directly and delimits the kinds of activities and relations that are possible where the woman is concerned need to be scrutinised. Human ecological theory in this way provides us with another guide for understanding the practical issues of what is available and the constraints in helping the women in the Malaysian context.

4.3.1 Advantages of using the ecological system approach

I see various advantages in using the ecological approach to this study:

- It locates women in the wider context, moving domestic violence away from a focus on only seeing it as a private problem to that of public sphere. Domestic violence is a public issue
- It is a holistic approach and provides an analysis of the complex way that the different levels of possible intervention and support contacts interweave
- It provides analyses of the mutual influence of transactions between the women and their immediate and wider environment at different levels

Thus, in this study, the ecological system theory is important in looking at the larger societal context.

The following section examines the model of 'needs and support' developed by Hester and Westmarland (2004). This model of 'needs and support' in the study of street prostitution, helped me to develop a model of Women in Crisis – Three Stages

Intervention for abused women. The concepts were appropriate for abused women and their interaction with the refuge as part of the women's ecosystem.

4.4 Model of 'needs and support'

Hester and Westmarland (2004) developed a model of 'needs and support' to explain the process involved in women and young people entering street prostitution, and how to enable them to exit.

Hester and Westmarland's (2004) model is based on an evaluation of interventions to tackle young people's or women's involvement in street prostitution based on the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) in the UK. They describe the women's involvement in prostitution as comprising a number of phases where the women are likely to move from vulnerability, chaos to stabilization to moving on. This process from entering, involving and then exiting prostitution is a long, complex and non-linear process with individuals oscillating between different stages given the existing circumstances and the available support. The model highlights crisis or 'turning' points as the catalysts that influence the person's decision to walk through the process from entering to exiting prostitution and these moments are fundamental to the shift from chaos to stabilization.

The complex process requires specific understanding of the experiences and the circumstances of the young people and women. In the model of 'needs and support' Hester and Westmarland (2004) indicated that several of the factors that lead women and young people into prostitution also potentially prevent them from exiting due to difficulties in obtaining state benefits, inadequate housing and their drug addiction problems.

The model stresses the significance of appropriate and timely support and providing particular interventions at the right moments, including multi-agency support.

The concepts in the Hester and Westmarland model of 'needs and support' are similar to my study in terms of the complex process involved in enabling women and young

people to exit from their problems. Within the 'needs and support' model, the women go through various stages from entering to exiting prostitution. In my study, the process is similar except that the respondents are domestic violence survivors. The 'needs and support' model suggests that specific understanding is required in regard to the experiences and the circumstances of the young people and women. Finally, the similarity between this model and my study lies in the fact that both are offering particular interventions at particular moments to the survivors involved.

I attempt to establish some differences between the 'needs and support' model and my study. Hester and Westmarland (2004) reported that based on the CRP project, the young people and women usually enter prostitution via a female or a male friend and some through their immediate family. This involved varying degrees of grooming and co-ercion by boyfriend/ pimp into prostitution to pay for drugs.

Hester and Westmarland (2004) further reported that the young people and women were more easily enabled to leave prostitution when they encountered certain events, for instance when they experienced physical and/or verbal abuse and/or forced sex from their client and/or partner. Their crisis was linked to certain traumatic events.

However, the situation of the young people and women in the CRP projects is different from that of the women in my study. Unlike the women in the 'needs and support' model who were groomed and co-erced by friends and family to enter into prostitution, the women in my study were not groomed or co-erced into their situations. They were placed in the condition by marrying men who abused them, even though they were men of their choice and whom they may love. In this situation women are trying to create a 'home' which is a haven, but because of the violence they are often unable to do so. Evidence from previous studies as have been discussed in chapter 3, and my study findings in chapter 7, 8, and 9 indicate that the women unravel their crisis after many years of experiencing domestic violence and only then do they find ways to leave their violent relationships.

Perhaps what is important for the ‘needs and support model’ and my work is that the process of abuse undermines women’s/young people’s self esteem. In the ‘needs and support’ model such abuse is before they become involved in prostitution and this makes them vulnerable to enter prostitution, while in my work the process of abuse creates barriers to getting out of the abusive relationship. For both works, the rebuilding of self-esteem is important to ‘move out’ and ‘move beyond’ the crisis.

In the following session I present the model that I called ‘Women in Crisis - 3 Stages of Intervention’ that will help to identify the crisis that the women underwent, their lives in the refuges and leaving refuges and how support services helped them.

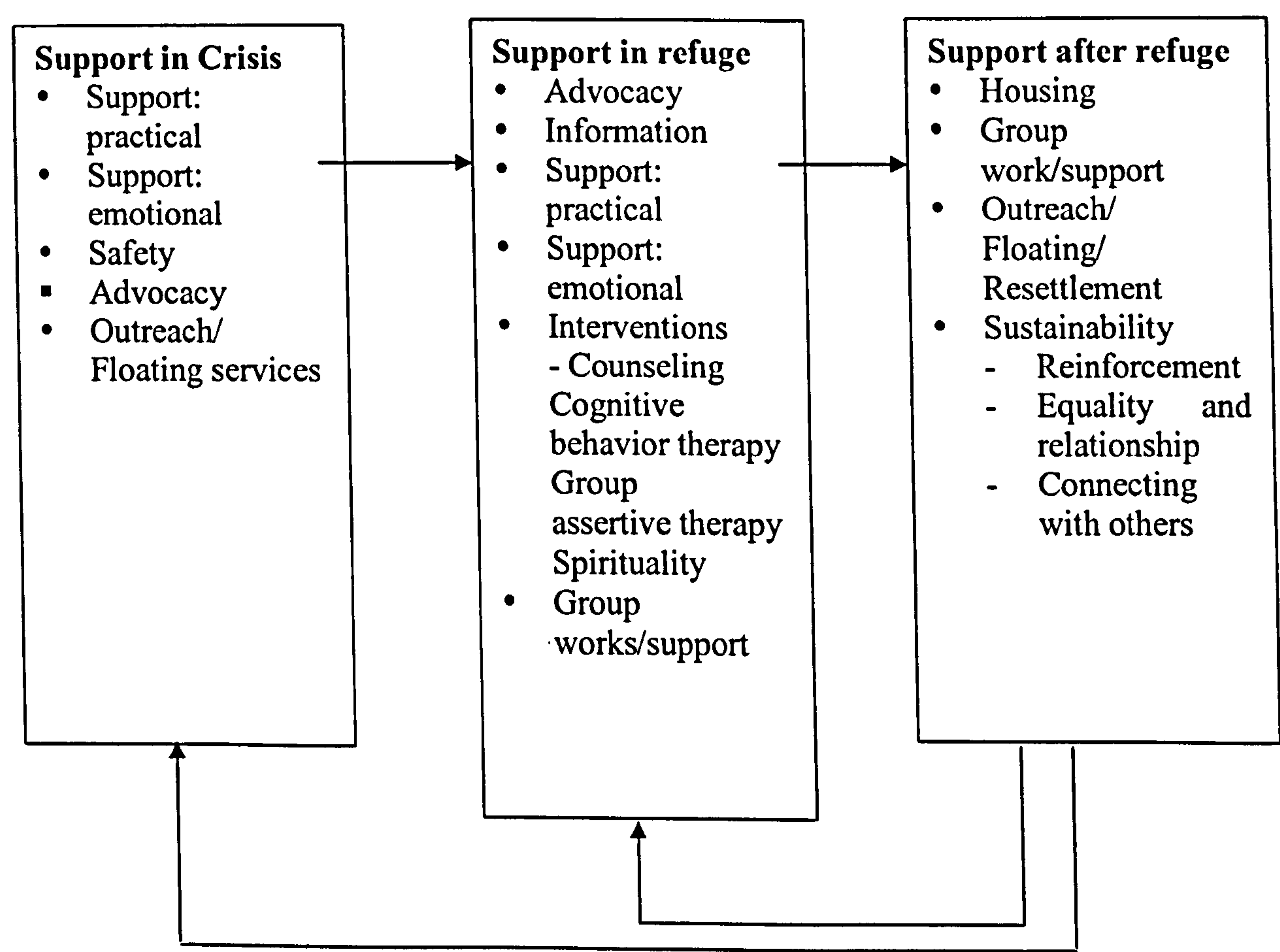
4.5 Model of ‘Women in Crisis - Three Stages of Intervention’

Model of ‘Women in Crisis - 3 Stages of Intervention’ is primarily based on this study about women’s experiences of being abused by their male partners. The study examines the experiences of the women while in the refuges and the changes the women underwent while sheltering in the refuges. The model helps to explain the impact of domestic violence and is a way to understand the support needed by the women to leave and move beyond violent relationships. The abused women are traumatized by the ill-treatment and struggle in their crisis, a process not dissimilar to that outlined in the model of ‘needs and support’. Model of ‘Women in Crisis – 3 Stages Intervention’ will be used in this chapter, and throughout the findings/discussion in chapters 7, 8, and 9.

Subsequently, throughout this chapter, the model of ‘Women in Crisis – 3 Stages Intervention’ will be utilized as the theoretical framework when relating to the women who were in crisis and are survivors of domestic violence. It examines the different stages and related interventions and supports for the women through the review of related literature. There are three main stages: support in crisis, support in the refuge and support after the refuge. I have emphasized that the services offered could overlap from one stage to another according to the women’s need as shown in figure 4.1. For example, as illustrated in the model, a domestic violence survivor initially is facing crisis and in this crisis, the woman needs various supports such as

practical and emotional, safety, advocacy and outreach services. Through all this support, the women will enter into refuge, when in this refuge she needs further support (advocacy, information support...) to stabilize her life. Finally, as she exits the refuge, she will need other types of support in regard to housing, group work/support, and others as outlined in the model below. Nonetheless, there is no straight line or linear process in terms of the progression from entering to leaving the refuge centre where the model shows that those who are leaving the refuge might be in crisis again and ‘relapse’, hence, requiring further interventions.

Figure 4.1: Model of ‘Women in Crisis - 3 Stages of Intervention’



Next, this chapter discusses women in crisis and the support they received based on literature related to domestic violence. The discussions also illustrate how the ‘Women in Crisis - 3 Stages of Intervention’ model is situated in other literature.

4.6 Crisis and ‘turning point’

This section discusses, first the concept of the crisis experienced by the abused women, thereafter the help and support given to the women based on the model, figure 4.1. This includes safety, practical and emotional support, advocacy and outreach or floating services.

Incidents of domestic violence are very stressful, and may lead to emotional crisis with the accompanying difficulty in dealing with and handling oneself and the abusive partner. Often this may affect one’s ability to cope emotionally, cognitively, or behaviorally (Hoff 1990). However, crisis can be argued to be a source of both danger and opportunity. As has been pointed out by Dobash and Dobash (2002) although continuous coercion, intimidation and violence can create anxiety, distress and depression, it can also create determination, action and bravery. The women question the men’s “inherent superiority and right to rule the roost” (Hague, Mullender and Aris 2003, pp.17). They begin to unravel the complexities of their crisis after many years of experiencing domestic violence. The women’s reasons for leaving their violent partner cannot be discussed in a single and neat concept. The women’s accounts in Hoff’s (1999) study illustrated the complex process that was involved in deciding finally to leave the violent men. Each woman presented her own unique circumstances and events leading to her decision to leave the crisis. These include: “fear that he would kill her; that she would kill herself; fear for her children or family; recognition that there is no hope for change; shock of a particular beating; horror of being beaten while pregnant” (Hoff, pp.63). As the women recognized this crisis, they felt that their views of love, marriage and friendship for their spouse had gone astray. Putit’s (2001) study on the lived experience of abused women in Malaysia reported that the women began to see the increasing danger and risk to life of being violently abused as they experienced the escalating violence and witnessed the negative effect on their children, and the silencing and social stigma that they are forced to endure. This prompted the women’s realization and action to leave their violent relationship. The refuges became their only viable option. This study revealed similar findings (See chapter 7).

The findings of some studies as in Hague, Mullender and Aris (2003), and Lawless (2001) bring to light the power of narrative as in the act of speaking of the violence and that led the women to emerge and separate themselves from the violence. By speaking aloud about their experiences the women realized that they were survivors of abuse, not the helpless victims. Hague et al. reported that as the women raised their voices, they discovered that they were not alone in their experiences. Lawless further asserts that

“it is through telling their stories that the women begin to sort things out, to name and acknowledge the violence, and to reflect on their own sense of self and how it has and has not emerged for them” (Lawless, pp.121-122).

The act of telling their stories and breaking the silence helped them to overcome their crisis through transformation and to construct new emergent selves. Lawless (2001) however recognized that not all the women's stories are success stories. Some women have to leave many times before they finally escape the abusive relationship. Some have to go back to alcohol and rehab centers and some struggle for many years, never really recovering from their crisis. There is some research that had look at alcohol and drug in the UK for example Barron (2004). Walker (1979) believes that women need more time to recover from their crisis.

Whalen (1996) strongly argued that crisis intervention is particularly appropriate after an acute abusive incident, when most women seek safety and shelter. Plans can be made not only for present safety but also future safety while information is provided about legal action and community resources.

Many begin to speak of their violence, and move beyond accepting their positions as women being abused and passive victims. The newly found strength in communicating their pain and violence finally propels them out of danger and into a safe shelter.

4.7 Practical and emotional support (in crisis)

There is an immense need for practical support for these women, to enable them to access appropriate help and services. The women need emotional support for healing and self restoration to begin. In reality, the practical and emotional support can be overlapping. Harris et al. (2001) study found out that the practical advice and emotional support allow the women to recognize their victimization and makes a large contribution to the decision to leave their violent relationship. The women need encouragement and information about what challenges are ahead of them and how to overcome them. The practical support indicated by Harris et al. includes advice about managing their situations, about how criminal justice works for them, and medical care for their injuries.

4.8 Post traumatic stress (PTS) as opposed to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

The distressing emotional state that the abused women experience should not be confused with mental breakdown that implies a psychiatric disorder. Some experts on domestic violence issues tend to diagnose battered women as having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and use this as a basis for understanding and treating battered woman. Walker (1979, 1994) for example, offers a conceptualization of abused women that tends to describe symptoms that are very similar to psychologically traumatic events related to soldiers' postwar experiences. The symptoms include that of nightmares, persistent fear that the violence will recur, anxiety reactions, phobias, and emotional liability. Kemp, Rawlings and Green (1991) similarly demonstrated that 84% of the 77 battered women in shelters met the DSM-III criteria for PTSD. They further posited the usefulness of this finding as with regards to diagnosis and treatment.

Herman (2001) convincingly argued that PTSD was an inappropriate diagnosis within the conservative nature of psychiatric DSM category. She argued that simplified treatment rendered for a complex trauma reaction can be unhelpful. It may denote a lack of understanding of the women's history of pain cause by domestic violence.

Humphrey and Joseph (2004) similarly criticized the legitimization of the DSM category for abused women. They elaborated PTSD as in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM) as symptoms that are grouped under three sections.

“(1) re-experiencing of the traumatic event;

(2) numbing of responsiveness to or reduced involvement in the external world; and

(3) a miscellaneous section which included memory impairment, difficulty concentrating, hyper alertness, or an exaggerated startle response

It was not only the set of responses which were crucial in defining the category but Criterion A also specified that an event also needed to be classified as traumatic – ⁹outside the range of normal human experience” (Humphrey and Joseph, pp.561).

Humphrey and Joseph (2004) further explained that the experiences of abused women differ from that of exceptional events such as airplane disaster or the sinking of a ferry as the woman is living under constant oppression and discrimination for a long period.

Herman’s (2001) conceptual frameworks could be used as baseline of approaches for both abused women and therapists. For women, the principal approach is to become empowered. The experience of abuse robs the survivors of a sense of power and control, and therefore the guiding principle of recovery for women being abused is to restore power and control. Herman asserts that the women themselves must be the author and arbiter of their own recovery. The women should recognize their condition and take steps to change it. Taking action to foster recovery empowers the women. The social workers and therapist should support and help the women in this process. Herman suggests the choice to confront horror in the past by reconstructing the trauma story (i.e. remembrance and mourning) can be a very helpful starting process

⁹ Criterion A includes events outside the range of usual human experience such as airplane disaster, flood, ferry sinking etc.

to help the women. Avoiding the traumatic memories may lead to stagnation in the recovery process. The first task for the therapist and the social workers is to help reframe the woman's mourning as an act of courage rather than humiliation. Only through mourning everything that she has lost can she discover her damaged inner life.

The therapist's and the social worker's role are both intellectual and relational, fostering insight and empathic connection with the women. The fundamental stages of recovery according to Herman are to establish safety, first focusing on the control of body, and gradually to move outwards toward control of environment. The bodily integrity includes attention to basic health needs, regulation of bodily functions such as sleep, exercise, management of post-traumatic symptoms, and control of self-destructive behaviours (if they exist). Environmental issues include the establishment of a safe living situation, financial security, mobility, and a plan for self-protection that encompasses the full range of the patient's daily life.

The next stage is restoring the connection between survivors and their community and to find anew a sustaining faith. Restoration of the social bond begins with the discovery that one is not alone. Groups afford a degree of support and understanding that is simply not available in the survivor's ordinary social environment. Herman further stated that groups provide the possibility not only of mutually rewarding relationships but also of collective empowerment.

4.9 Ensuring safety

Often when women leave the violent relationship, they move away to a safe and secret place. When women have left the violent relationship, they are in a vulnerable state, fragile, potentially helpless, in fear. The women's temporary options would be their relatives, friends or the refuges (Putit, 2001; Jamayah et al., 2005). In some instances, as in the study by Jamayah et al. (2005), the family and friends become part of the problems rather than part of the solution, especially where the culture failed to define domestic violence as a public problem. The feelings of insecurity are often augmented by social stigma in a society that is patriarchal. The women believe

that they are often to be blamed for not keeping the family intact as the woman's role is to nurture the family. But in their desperate situations, factors such as physical strength and the availability of social resources, safety and support are fundamental. Herman (2001), a psychiatrist, emphasized the provision of safety as the central task of the first stage in recovery. Various work on domestic violence such as Hester, Pearson, Harwin, Abrahams (2007); Hague et al. (2003), Dobash and Dobash (2002), Herman (2001), Harris et al. (2001), Levison and Harwin, (2000) and (2001), Hoff (1990) emphasize finding and securing safe refuge as fundamental crisis intervention.

Abrahams (2007) study's finding revealed that establishing and maintaining physical and mental safety are crucial during the women's stay at the refuge, and as the women left the refuge, having to face the community and other challenges that lay ahead. Establishing safety according to Herman (2001) is two fold. First, safety that begins from giving attention to the body such as self care to one's physical, mental and emotional health. The focus on safety progresses to adjustment of the environment such as seeking a safe shelter, financial security, moving independently and a plan for self protection.

According to Humphreys et al. (2000), safety for the women facing domestic violence includes safety planning, organizational safety measures, and supporting mothers as a response to child protection and worker's safety. Safety planning for the women and children should aim to keep them practically safe. Also, the potential for the perpetrators harm of the workers should be considered. For these reasons, organizational safety measures should be in place. Safety should be guarded at the premises, in policies of attendance, confidentiality, provision of information, which should be linked to other agencies (Hester, 2001). Hester et al. (2007) in discussing safety planning say that it encompasses:

“identifying a safe place in case of further violence, awareness of safe personal contacts, procedures for contacting helpline and emergency services, security measures for the home for example locks, panic buttons and alarms, keeping important documents in a safe and secure place, maintaining a cache of spare keys, money and emergency clothing” (pp.249).

4.10 Advocacy

The main role of an advocate as developed for example by the UK and US is to offer support to the women. In UK, the advocates known as the independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs) ‘walk’ with the women, give personal advice and support and help them access the range of services they need. This service involves supporting the woman with a named caseworker who liaises effectively with statutory and voluntary agencies. The support from IDVAs, as reported by the Home Office in their National Report regarding Domestic Violence (March 2005):

“reduces repeat victimisation; reduces attrition rates in the criminal justice system; increases victim satisfaction and confidence; and is cost effective” (pp10).

The evidence was from the project funded by the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme Violence Against Women Initiatives.

Specifically, in response to each unmet need identified, the advocate actively works with the women to obtain appropriate resources. Advocates might expect to help the women in various phases simultaneously.

During the crisis stage the conflicts and tension felt by the women can be so overwhelming, that it might cripple them in dealing with their responsibilities. Information and assistance in advocacy are important to the women. The workers in Abrahams’ (2007) study claimed that knowledge, persistence and determination not to be ‘fobbed off’ are essential for any successful interventions in dealing with the various agencies. The women in the similar studies confide that they have experienced various difficulties with some agencies such as being passed from one agency to another and there seems to be no actual help available to them.

Some women reported that the agencies insisted on using terms that are alien and difficult to understand, and as such increasing further tension to the women’s condition. As the women undergo the transitional phase of recovery, they will need practical support in legal issues, services for their children, employment, child care, and housing. However, it is important to balance between fostering unnecessary

dependency and compromising opportunities for individual women. As pointed out by Abrahams,

“although the workers aimed to support and empower women to take action for themselves when dealing with these agencies (as they would have to do in the future), they accepted that there were times when it was necessary for them to go beyond this and work as advocates with, and on behalf of, women to help them obtain a just solution to problems, or their rightful entitlements (2007, pp.53).

There is strong evidence that abused women who worked with advocates demonstrated positive outcomes, for example Sullivan’s and Bybee’s (1999) study in North America on 278 abused women who have left the refuge, and have received advocacy intervention. This randomized field trial experimental evaluation project at Midwest Shelter Programme reported that the women experienced significant positive effects in social support, accessing community resources and quality of life. The longitudinal latent structural equation modeling (SEM), used to examine the mediation process through which change occurred revealed that working with an advocate had an immediately positive effect on women’s social support and effectiveness in obtaining resources, which led to improvement in their subjective well-being and quality of life. The community advocacy project intervention reduced women’s depression while improving the women’s esteem. The women demonstrated that positive outcomes persisted through 2-year follow-up. Over time, this improved quality of life led to significant protection from abuse. (Bybee and Sullivan, 2002).

Expanding from Sullivan and Bybee (1999), Bybee and Sullivan (2002) and Sullivan, Bybee and Allen (2002) findings, Allen, Bybee and Sullivan’s (2004) study conclude that in order to maximize the impact of intervention on the women’s well being and quality of life, it is essential for advocacy efforts to focus on each individual woman’s specific needs and desires. The study suggests that women who received comprehensive advocacy were more effective in meeting their needs than women who had not received such support.

Therefore advocacy is needed by the women not only while they are in the refuge but also when they left the refuge. There seems to be minimal advocacy intervention as a specific and structured programme provided by the refuges where my study was done. However, advocacy services are provided when needs arise, such as support with the police report, criminal justice, children care and children's school which will be described further under the discussion on practical and emotional support while women are in the refuge.

4.11 Outreach

Some authors used the term 'floating services' to discuss outreach programmes. Outreach is support work with women and children who are in crisis and remain in the community [not in a refuge]. It is important to recognize that many women are not aware of the abuse-specific agencies and appropriate services that are available in the community. 46 out of 105 women in the Harris et al. (2001) study indicated that shelter staff provided the largest number of referrals to a wide range of services available in the community. This information is crucial and helpful in facilitating the women's development and life after refuge. The outreach programme workers can help the women and children provide information and act as advocates. The workers can help the women and children to adjust and establish themselves in a new environment and community that they are yet not familiar with. Help and support also includes community development and education.

In UK, the majority of refuge projects offer outreach and support services. Humphreys et al. (2000) study found out that 71% in England and 88% in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland offered such services. The outreach service included one-to-one support, groups in the community, telephone support, advocacy with other organizations and educational activities.

Hester and Westmarland (2005) reported that women found that the outreach help enhanced their contact with other agencies. In their study of the Cheshire domestic violence outreach services that they found that a "well structured and tailored

outreach approach with an agreed plan of action that incorporated support to children was particularly effective” (ibid, pp.90).

4.12 Supporting women in the refuge

As the women left the violent relationship and entered the refuge, they needed specific help and support. The support could be given one-to-one or in a group. They needed help and support to facilitate self development and enhance change. The women learned to analyse their experiences and situations as they articulated their needs and concern. They needed counselling services to start the healing process and initiate empowerment. The group work and support from other women in the refuge helped develop their esteem and confidence through recreational activities (see chapter 8). Therapeutic services could also be provided at the refuge. These included cognitive behaviour techniques, cognitive assertive therapy and spiritual approaches. Through these approaches the women could learn new patterns of interacting; empowering and self enhancing ways of thinking, feeling and behaving.

4.13 Practical and emotional support in the refuge

Abrahams (2007) describes the support to the women “as facilitating a structured process” that begins as the women leaves the relationship and enter the refuge. This support continues as the women leave the refuge and begin living independently. The practical and emotional supports as described by Abrahams are two separate but intertwining processes that are crucial in rebuilding lives for women. The practical support includes information, assistance and advocacy that vary in each stage of recovery (Abrahams, 2007). Practical support is imperative from the time the women settle at the refuge, during registration and as they obtain access to benefits. Abrahams further emphasizes that emotional support is essential throughout the process so as to enable the women to build trust in others again. Given some sense of physical and emotional support and security, the women can regain esteem and confidence, to move on, both in the refuge and when leaving the refuge. With some help the woman can make some plan and set goals of what to do and how to go about it. A refuge does not only offer a safe place, but also a physical, social and learning

space where women can take the opportunity to recover from the effects of domestic violence.

4.14 Counselling

The women in the Harris et al. (2001) study stated that counselling and emotional support led them to a better understanding of themselves and their situations and thus led to improved coping strategies. 46% of 105 women in Harris study stated that counselling and emotional support was of greater value than any other type of help received.

Coleman and Guildford (2001), working in the field of mental health, argued that mental health problems are difficult to treat with conventional medication. The individual with mental health problems should have access to services which are responsive, timely and effective. They challenge the use of copious medication that does not help strengthen the individual's psychological wellbeing. This rings true for women traumatized by the experience of domestic violence and not given effective services for their mental health problems. Instead the women were only treated with anti depressive drugs and tranquillizers that only last for a certain number of hours. Like Coleman and Guildford (2001), various experts in domestic violence posit counselling as an appropriate approach in understanding and intervening on behalf of women experiencing domestic violence. Abrahams (2007) for example stated that "counselling is complementary to other support systems and part of an integrated package of refuge support". A high proportion of women in Abrahams's (2004) study in the refuges in England expressed the opinion that counselling helped in the journey of their recovery, individual feelings of self esteem and self-efficacy, empowerment and healing that result in a more fulfilling lives.

Counsellors followed various theoretical approaches in understanding the complex nature of the impact of domestic violence on the women (Abrahams, 2007). Central to the counselling endeavour are counselling skills and the establishment of a relationship (connection) with the abused women. In counselling, the women need to talk about their experience of violence and its impact on them, and to understand their

relationship and their role. The counsellors must be able to listen and respond to the women's fears, their particular needs and desires. There are sometime theoretical contradiction between the provision and individualized therapeutic intervention and the theoretical analysis which look to wider social structures. While being aware of this contradiction I believe that individual interventions are necessary.

4.15 Group work and mutual support

The immediate aim of refuges and crisis centers is to help women deal with the physical, emotional and practical consequences of violence. While their approaches to this task may vary, most social workers emphasise the need for women to share their experiences with others in similar situation and to learn positive lessons for the future (Doyal, 1995). The group provides social and psychological support to its members. Social support works by being in the presence of others or providing the resources for this. The group provides social companionship. The companionship of other women with similar experiences of being abused by their partner can offer supportive individual relationships. Social support includes the gratification of emotional needs such as approval from significant others. Significant others in the refuge play a role as a buffer against stress in individuals who have experienced domestic violence. Although clinicians can assist in many ways, others are often more credible and preferred over therapists with no personal experience (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995). Interactions are more helpful to the women. Tedeschi and Calhoun note that a relationship with people who have experienced similar difficulties often provides a useful way of understanding the coping process, because they may be able to discuss specific emotional reactions and concerns that survivors experience. Often, the women develop a certain cohesiveness which is nurtured through their stay in the refuges. They provide a positive view of circumstances that survivors can use in attempting to cope. Mutual support groups also provide a unique opportunity to be helpful to others, maintaining a sense of mutuality and reciprocity. These altruistic acts have been viewed as productive, mature responses to trauma (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1995).

The women increase their self esteem through the interactions and contact with other women in the group. Hague et al. (2003) argued that the women have been put in a position of submission and unquestioned obedience by their violent partner and they need to build esteem and self worth again:

“for the women who have experienced abuse, the very process of survivor consultation and participation can be individually empowering and can work against ideas and attitudes about stigma and spoiled identity” (ibid, pp.83).

Support groups, through social cohesion challenge social isolation and that gives them the strength to deal and cope with the experiences of abused. Support groups, by their nature, if run supportively and sensitively, can enable abused women to build their strength and self esteem. Individual and collective strength builds individual empowerment and collective empowerment for the abused women through the strength of the group.

Hester and Westmarland's (2005) study on the Crime Reduction Project in UK reported that groupwork was useful in helping women to “move on” and that the women valued being able to share experiences and ideas with other women who had had similar experiences (pp.90). The group processes, through group dynamics, make the women feel lifted and strengthened in some ways, thus making them able to progress and make personal changes in their lifestyle with more confidence.

4.16 Therapy services

Therapy services discussed in this section includes cognitive behaviour therapy, group assertiveness and spirituality. Unlike medication, therapy services may take a while to be effective. It is important to note that for women who have only a short stay in the refuge, the therapy programme may need to continue when the women leave the refuge.

Stages of recovery from being abuse by one's partner are similar to those of healing from psychological trauma. Based on Walker (1994) and Herman (2001), these stages include establishing safety, empowerment, and healing. When the women are thus amply supported and have the necessities for transition to a new life free of violence,

they are usually ready for therapy services such as cognitive-behaviour, group assertiveness, and spirituality. Therapy of these kinds not only helps women with their psychological well being, but also develops their skills in managing any crisis in a more confident and effective manner. Walker (1994) cautions us that therapeutic interventions with abused women are difficult because they have to survive in a hyper vigilant environment.

4.16.1 Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behaviour therapy was developed by psychologists with the aim of reeducating people with distorted beliefs. While this therapy is popularly used for anger control and stress management and therefore commonly found in literature about batterers, the technique can also be used to apply to abused women. It can help develop the women's skills and control their lives in a more effective way. Victimized women develop what Walkers (1994) termed as learned helplessness as the women believed that they did not possess the skills and ability to protect themselves and fight back. The abused women can learn new patterns of interacting through CBT. Webb (1992) posited a CBT process that involves a number of stages: engagement, assessment, and goal identification, the development of an action plan and treatment strategies, and evaluation.

Engagement means developing and establishing a positive trusting relationship between the women and the counsellor therapist. This is essential as the abusive experience makes the women learn not to trust others. The women need to be educated in the theory underpinning CBT and develop skills and confidence in themselves and others.

During the assessment stage, the therapist examines how women's patterns of behaviour develop and are maintained, through verbal communication and through keeping a journal. The psychotherapist then provides tangible information to the women about their strengths, weaknesses, and treatment issues (Webb, 1992). Assessment also helps the therapist to design treatment plans and intervention strategies to best suit the women.

Both the therapist and the women identify and establish the goals for treatment. This is done through identifying the problems, analyzing and prioritizing dysfunctional patterns of behaviour.

The next stage is the development of an action plan. The therapist identifies appropriate intervention techniques and specific steps in order for the woman to achieve her specific goals. Webb (1992) reminded us that small goals need to be identified first so that the women could feel a sense of accomplishment early in the intervention.

The final stage of the CBT process is evaluation of the women's progress. Webb (1992) reminded that some women may need relatively more time with the treatment process.

CBT intervention can be done in two phases; first in the individual, then in a group setting. It is encouraged that CBT be done to the individual first. Until the woman builds trust in others and regain some confidence they should not be involved with group activities such as group CBT.

4.16.2 Group assertive therapy

Group assertive therapy is a powerful means of education, support and healing. It differs from the group work discussed earlier. In this group assertive therapy, the sessions are commonly facilitated by a psychotherapist. It begins with the assessment process, followed by planning and implementation usually through simulation and role play of problem situations. The women will then be evaluated, and learn assertiveness through getting feedback from the evaluators. Walker believed that ideally the group should be of two stages. The first stage would be women who are in crisis and trying to recover from crisis. The second stage would be women who have been successful and are now facing other developmental issues. Walker (1979) recommended that group therapy should be done in groups composed of other abused women. Having other abused women in a group could reduce the sense of isolation

felt by a woman. She can also learn a new cognition from other women and benefit from the group norms that support positive behavioural changes. .

Meyers-Abell and Jansen (1980) reported their study of a group assertive therapy programme for abused women at a refuge in the Midlands in Great Britain. All the women were interviewed. The group met for a 2 hours session, 3 times a week during their stay at the shelter. The use of simulation and role play of problem situations helped the women learn from their experience, and this was followed by a presentation from the leaders about the specific skills necessary for assertive behaviour. The key concepts were repeated as new group members attended. In using this approach, Meyers-Abell and Jansen (1980) cautioned therapists to prepare the women to deal with possible negative outcomes and make it as an integral part of any assertive therapy for abused women. For women who return to their husbands when leaving the refuge, they are faced with trying to put into practice what they learnt while in the refuge about assertiveness. It can be very challenging as there is a potential conflict for women in becoming resilient and fighting back. This can subsequently render them as challenging gender norms.

However for women who do not return to their husbands when leaving the refuge, assertiveness can help in handling the following:

- The overwhelming prospect of applying for and living on welfare
- Seeking vocational training and job placement
- Following through with divorce proceedings
- Coping with the world of which little they know

Therapy services such as that of group assertive therapy programmes or intervention have not been established in Malaysia. Such activities might be practised in Malaysia but in a less structured programme or in a less formal manner which one cannot claim to be a professional group assertive therapy.

4.16.3 Spirituality

Women being abused by their partners may use various coping strategies to deal with domestic violence. Spirituality can be a positive resource and a possibility for change for women who are survivors of violence. Depending on the women's need, the refuges could offer an environment for spiritual healing through co-operation with religious groups and other community agencies. Gillum, Sullivan and Bybee (2006) study reported that of 151 women, 97% stated that a source of strength and comfort for them was spirituality or God. The spiritual component in the refuge service programme helps to lessen the depression and appears to promote greater psychological well-being, greater self esteem, and better quality of life. In Gillum et al. study in the USA, the women felt the benefit from their faith community. The faith community provided them with a social support network, practical assistance and spiritual encouragement, and that gave them added emotional and practical support.

King (1996) similarly describes spirituality as relating to “the power of mind, spirit, and imagination” (ibid, pp148). The women felt that a strong belief in religious and spiritual self-determination provided connection to the power of healing and hope, facilitated by the network of support in their faith community and other community agencies.

King (1996) affirmed that spirituality can “provide a vision of strength and empowerment that can assist us in the struggle to overcome violence” (ibid, pp.148). Their trust in the higher power could sustain the women, out of strength, not their own, but nourished by the resources of their faith. Humphreys (2000) study of 50 ethnically diverse women who have resided for at least 21 days in the abused women's shelters indicated that spirituality was associated with greater internal resources that buffer distressing feelings and calm the mind. This study shows support of spirituality as a means of reducing distress through greater connection to oneself and powers beyond oneself.

4.17 Supporting women after leaving the refuge

The women who leave the refuge are likely to need some form of continuing short term and/or long term support. The women might need practical and emotional support for rehousing and resettlement. Group work and support, and outreach programmes play an important role in helping the women to live beyond the refuge.

4.17.1 Housing

After leaving violent men, women feel unsafe to return home even if the man concerned has been effectively excluded. The women are clear about the danger that they face (Hague and Malos, 2005; Malos and Hague, 1993). The women need short and long term housing resources if they are going to live independently from domestic violence. It takes great courage and is a huge step for the women and the children to leave home, often with only a suitcase or perhaps the clothes they are wearing (Hague and Malos, 2005; Abrahams, 2007).

In the UK Hague and Malos (2005) reported that “applying to be rehoused by local councils or housing associations is often their only option” (ibid, pp.109). The UK housing council has provided “decent and well-built accommodation for many millions of citizens at affordable rent” (pp.112). In areas where there are inadequate housing projects, the women from refuge accommodation have to wait in temporary accommodation for two years or more. The women and their children may be temporarily housed in council or housing association projects, bed and breakfast hotels or in privately leased accommodation. Under the Housing Act, 1996, some local authorities and housing associations make effort to provide “good, supportive temporary accommodation in self-contained units, cluster flats and shared houses, including facilities for children” (pp.124). However, bed and breakfast hotels seem to be placing the abused women and children at risk of physical danger for lack of security and absence of support, Hague and Malos rightly argued. They further reminded us that in the development of domestic violence and homelessness policies, the relevant departments of councils, trade unions and professional associations must be practically in close link with refuge services and other voluntary group sectors.

Hoff's (1996) study findings in the US similarly reported a shortage of affordable housing, especially in low and moderate income categories. This chronic problem has arisen as a result of "gentrification, political corruption, and mismanagement of publicly owned housing" (pp186). There are emergency placements but hundreds of people are often placed on a waiting list that may continue for several months. Hoff argued that the women and their children should remain at home as a matter of justice. Perhaps the violent men need to be retained in detention centres until there is reasonable assurance that they can be safely be allowed to return to homes where women and children dwell. The women have the right to a residence free of violence.

However, Melbin, Sullivan, Cain (2002) study in the US reported that the advocates offered transitional housing programme where the women can live for 12 to 24 months or until they can obtain the permanent home. Besides housing, there were other related programmes to support the women in the transitional housing programme. These included counselling, support groups, safety planning, and various forms of practical assistance such as transportation, telephones, referrals to other agencies and advocacy. Some programmes offered additional assistance in order to meet the women's individual needs. The women were also encouraged and given support to attend workshops with regard to education, employment, budget, parenting and nutrition. In addition supports with other recreational activities were offered; this included tickets to attend community events, social gatherings, and field trips for their children. The transitional housing programmes also advise the women to gain the opportunity from partnerships with community agencies, businesses and /or housing resources. Melbin et al.'s (2002) study in six of the transitional housing programmes in one of the midwestern states suggested that such services are critical and should be further expanded across the country. Melbin et al. study of transitional housing explains what services are offered and what the benefits of the services are for women and children.

Not having access to housing resources, many abused women are forced either to live in inadequate, unsafe conditions or to return to their abusers (Mebin et al., 2002, Jamayah et al., 2005).

4.17.2 External support

The women need ongoing external support to withstand and sustain life after staying in a refuge. External support includes social support from the women's community. The continued support includes that from family, friends, self help groups, clergy, employers and any one else who is significant to the women. These are networks that the women are significantly related to and who perhaps could actually or potentially be called on for help and to serve as cultural and social requisites to avoid crisis. The women should feel welcome to join local groups and take part in local activities. These highly complex webs of relationship between the women and her social resources could be a strong reinforcement for women to leave violent relationships.

External support includes changing society's views so that abuse becomes visible: a private affair becomes one of public issue and concern. This kind of social reinterpretation assumes a whole new dimension rather than rationalizing, minimizing and denying the men's validity to abuse women. Once it is reinterpreted as being in the public domain, and disapproval of violence against women is part of the general view, women don't have to put up with the abuse and don't have to experience social stigma. Also it gives societal sources of support to the women.

In addition, external support should be also come from the law and the law enforcement policy and other agencies. It is well documented by researchers and activists concerned with domestic violence that when the public services are made more accessible and available, this will give a strong sense of reinforcement to the women and the confidence to leave violent relationships (Hester et al., 2007; Hester and Westmarland, 2005; Hague and Malos, 2005; Hester and Westmarland, 2004; Dobash and Dobash, 2002; Hoff, 1996; Mama, 1989).

4.18 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the relevance of using the ecological system theory as part of the theoretical framework for this study. It is used to help understand the women and how they are placed in and part of a social system. The woman is positioned within the multilayered systems that are interactive with each other. The multilayered system influences directly and delimits the activities of the woman and her attempt to access a support system.

This chapter has look at the different interventions and has acknowledged the contradiction between the wider social structure and individual support. It needs to be acknowledged that there are different welfare provision between Malaysia and the UK.

Next, I used the model of ‘needs and support’ developed by Hester and Westmarland (2004). I linked this model of the process of moving out of an abusive situation with a review of the literature about the women’s needs and support using various studies on support and intervention. I have discussed the needs and support at various stages based on the women in crisis – three stages intervention model, when they are supported in the refuge and when they leave the refuge. In the next chapter I set out the methodology that I used to design and implement this study.

Chapter 5 Methodology and Methods

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology and methods used for this study.

The chapter examines the qualitative methodology and the case study approach. It discusses the theory and arguments affecting the choice of research and data gathering strategy for this research. The later section deals with the research design and its validity and reliability.

5.2 Methodological rationale

In selecting the methodology for a research project, it is necessary to choose one appropriate to the issue under investigation, and that should also be congruent with the theoretical frameworks within its operation.

This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The qualitative research approach is the best way to accommodate the nature of this explorative study of the women residents of the refuges.

In Malaysia this issue is under-researched. A qualitative research approach can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As has been mentioned in the literature review chapter, there has never been any comprehensive research in the study of the refuges in Malaysia. There is only one published article that revealed the statistics at WAO services from 1982-2001, reported by Ivy (2001). There has been very little discussion about the life of these women while in the refuge and their life after refuge.

Using a qualitative research method is an approach which opens and sets up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of the subjects the researcher is investigating. Qualitative data invites, rather than tries to control, the possibility of a rich array of information (Holliday 2002; Rigas, 1998). Qualitative research reports are typically rich with details and insights into participants' experiences of the world, and are thus more meaningful (Stake, 1995; Rigas 1998). They can be used to gain new perspectives on things about

which not much is already known. A qualitative research approach allows the exploration of human experience. As the research is continuously reformulated in line with the new data that comes to light, it provides fresh and powerful analyses of the women's experience.

To produce a more detailed and comprehensive picture of the situation, I chose to interview the women with experience of being in a Malaysia refuge. The interviews provided in-depth information that would be difficult to convey quantitatively. In this study the in-depth interviews were largely used to gather data as they generate depth of coverage. As stated by Patton (2002), the most effective strategy to ascertain the in-depth perspectives of others is through qualitative interviewing. It allowed me to probe for further information and greater clarity. It was through the data collection and the process of analysis that I elicited a rich array of in-depth information about the abused women's experiences that I have sought to explore. It contributes significantly to understanding the complexity and uniqueness of each individual woman I interviewed; her experiences, the culture, and context.

5.3 Using case studies approach

In my search for a significant research approach, I was convinced that it would be more desirable for the purpose of this study to adopt a case study approach. As argued by Yin (2003a) in his earlier writing, the distinctive need for case studies research arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. The case study is neither a data collection tactic nor merely a design feature alone but a comprehensive research strategy (Stoecker, 1991 in Yin 2003b). Yin further argued that case studies are empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A case studies approach has been chosen for this research because domestic violence and the survivors' experiences are complex social phenomena. The case studies provide advantages in creating novel and profound insights into the women's experiences. A case studies approach revealed comprehensively, the unique experiences of the women and the organisations being studied. I wanted to focus on cases that could serve as examples for a range of refuges

that would help in understanding the refugees in the Malaysian context. In addition, a case study approach was used because of the limited accessibility of refugees in Malaysia. Further:

“case study approach deal with the person as a totality as well as the way they act everyday within their natural environment. In this way it is possible for the person to be observed expressing themselves and acting freely, in a unique and authentic manner” (Rigas, 1998, pp.217).

Thus, case studies allow investigation to retain the holistic meaningful characteristics of the real life events such as the study of refugees and women’s experiences.

Stake (1995) considers the case study to be not “a methodological choice but a choice of object to be studied”. The object must be a “functioning specific” (Yin 2003b, pp.18). In this study the functioning specifics are the women, the social workers and programme that make up each of the two prospective cases.

Case studies are empirical inquiries that utilise multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2003a, Gomm, 2000). For this study, sources include interviews, visits to sites and documentation. I employed various strategies to address my research questions. These included face to face interviews, telephone interviews, discussions with the director and senior social workers, discussion with other service providers in the local service network, direct observations of the events/ participants, documentary reviews and archival records. The data converge in a triangulating fashion as they help to validate each other and the rich arrays of data also serve for comparison. My interviews with the clients and discussions with service providers aimed to identify their understanding of:

- Successful practice within the context of their programmes
- Critical component of their programme
- How their programme perceived the needs of the service users
- How the programme and service providers responded to the women: intervention and the follow-up

Besides other professionals and academics, representatives from the social work department were also interviewed. This interview data helped to corroborate any insight with key informants, and any opinions about issues related to the study. There was also a richness of anecdotal evidence gathered from the fieldwork that served to support the interpretations and possible generalisations arising from the data and analysis.

The use of qualitative and case study approaches for this research is a strategic ideal that provides a direction and a framework. I see qualitative and case study approaches as interconnected and mutually reinforcing in answering my research questions. The methodology was chosen in order to develop specific designs and concrete data collection tactics that were appropriate to the study of women's experience in the refuges in the Malaysian setting.

5.4 Research design

5.4.1 Ethical considerations

“Qualitative researchers, because they deal with the individual person face-to-face on a daily basis, are attuned to making decisions regarding ethical concerns, because this is part of life in the field (Janesick, 1998, pp.41).

Prior to commencement of the study a range of ethical considerations were taken into account. First I sought approval from the Ethics Committee, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol. Equally important to the completion of this study are approval from the refuges, informed consent from participants (see appendix 1, 2), and other ethical decisions in the field. The following are the steps that I took.

5.4.1.1 Access

For the refuge service providers and users, I sought approval through the directors and social work managers. This was done through various stages of discussions by email and phone. The procedures for informed consent and interview arrangement were carried out in several stages. The potential participants received a briefing by intermediaries at the refuge. This included a brief overview of my research and its purpose, the area to be covered, how interviews would be conducted and what and

how information would be used. Informed consent and participant information would be discussed before the participants got involved (Mason, 2002; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Kvale, 1996). The participants were briefed about my research project verbally and in writing. The participants were informed of their right to safety, privacy, confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons. Time commitments and data-collection settings were negotiated with each organisation, prior to my fieldwork. I informed the director and manager that the interview with each participant might take thirty minutes to an hour.

During my fieldwork, I was assured a quiet, private room that was prepared for the interview sessions. The setting was informal and that suited the volunteers' comfort. There were very minimal distractions in most of the interview sessions. I informed the participants that I was aware of the sensitive issues, but that it was vital to bring forward the experiences of women being abused and bring awareness to the experiences.

I am aware that this kind of interview potentially increases the participants' stress. My approach and my desire was to support these women. I particularly made a conscious effort, focusing throughout the contact with the participants on my attending skills, to try verbally and non-verbally to communicate a warm, empathetic and non-judgmental attitude. At the initiation phase, I established rapport and communicated simple common issues. I only began the interview when the participants indicated their readiness to be interviewed. I had to be very careful about the ways in which I asked and prompted questions. I gave support by showing understanding of their experiences, by applying my knowledge, skills and experience in handling women being abused. I have experience working with abused women as a para counsellor. I had earlier obtained permission from the director and manager that I would get the trained staff at the refuges to help, should support for the women be needed beyond my role as a researcher, or the women become distressed as a result of the interview.

There were several participants who expressed that they felt relieved to be given the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Some were eager to discuss their future plans.

The need to make participants feel that their contribution is valued is important. All participants were given acknowledgement of participation, and they will be sent a summary of research findings for their interest and information upon request.

5.4.1.2 Organisational ethics

It is always important to treat organisations with respect, sharing knowledge and experiences while conducting research. I am aware, as Morse (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) pointed out that administrators may, for example, be wary of a project that will essentially evaluate their personal institution, if they have no control over the research outcomes, or if they feel that the results may be detrimental to the organisation, even if the researcher assures them that the site will not be identified in the final reports.

These fears would be dispelled by abiding by the policy set by the particular refuge. For this study, the policy that was communicated to the authorities at the refuges through emails included:

- Signing confidentiality forms, that I would keep their addresses and clients' names confidential
- Giving back the thesis report to the organisations

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in the transcript and throughout this thesis to replace participants' name and place that might identify the participant. The second point indicates a reciprocal obligation to the organisations involved.

In relation to data protection, I complied fully with the requirements of current data protection legislation, Data Protection Act (1998), University of Bristol, UK. On return from each interview sessions, all the data was kept locked in a locker in the room where I stayed in Malaysia. I carried all the data by hand luggage upon leaving

and returning to Bristol, UK. In Bristol, the data was kept in a locked cupboard in my room. I ensure that no others have had access to the data as I transcribed the tapes myself and stored the data securely on the password protected server.

5.5 Samples and sampling

5.5.1 Selecting the study sites

Trying to establish a study site was challenging as there are limited refuges for battered women in Malaysia. I learnt that there are only six such refuges. Through the Malaysian websites and the journals, and my various emails and phone communications with the few contacts who work in the area of domestic violence, I was introduced to some organizations that deal with women's issues. There were refuges that failed to respond to my enquiries; one of the organisations indicated their unwillingness to participate because of the very minimal use of the refuge. There are other refuges that accommodate a range of people with different needs in one organisation. The residents who seek for shelter and support would include all age groups which may include old people, orphans, and disabled, to name a few, as well as abused women.

For a valid study I needed to ensure that in the possible setting in which the study was conducted the accommodation was only for abused women. After a few rounds of contacts, I finally managed to gain access and clearance to do fieldwork at two of the refuges in Malaysia both of which are non government organisations. There might be differences between GO and NGO for example the impact of having volunteers in NGO which could be a limitation of the study.

The initial contacts with refuges in Malaysia started in August 2005, through various emails and phone conversations with directors/senior social workers at the refuges. At this point, the methods for participant selection were purposive sampling, and the participants were recruited on a voluntary basis. All contacts were made through intermediary persons at the refuges. The refuges operated on a consultative basis.

The workers discussed my proposed research, questions and clarifications of expectations amongst the workers and the residents. It was after this that I was invited to carry out the research. Once I obtained the clearance for my fieldwork at the particular organisations through emails, I also obtained verbal consent from the managers by phone, finally writing officially by mail.

During fieldwork, I was also open to making ‘on-the-spot’ decisions (Patton, 2002) in the event of samples snowballing. In deciding the number of participants for this study, I needed to be aware that the number of participants should be large enough for me to make meaningful comparisons in relation to my research questions, but not so large as to become so diffuse that it would not be possible to make penetrating interpretations of the interview (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mason, 2002; Kvale, 1996). This means that the interview samples stop when I reach theory-saturation point. The sample should provide access to enough data to address the study’s questions, i.e when I have a picture of what is going on and my data can generate an appropriate explanation (Mason, 2002; Kvale 1996). Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002).

5.5.2 Fieldwork

Janesick (1998) reminded us that access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research. The researcher must establish trust, rapport, and authentic communication patterns with participants. By establishing trust and rapport at the beginning of the study, the researcher is better able to capture the nuance and meaning of each participant’s life from the participant’s point of view.

Janesick (1998) further argued that participants will be more willing to share everything, warts and all, with the researcher, once trust and rapport is established between the researcher and the participants. It is important to maintain trust and rapport throughout the study and long after. I keep reminding myself of these cautions throughout my fieldwork. I was careful in my approach as I was concerned that talking about personal matters and sensitive issues such as domestic violence

quite early on might stop women from opening up. I usually started with a warm smile, greetings and non personal conversations, and began with the interview once the participants indicated their readiness and willingness to be interviewed.

I managed to collect data at two refuges in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I was initially excited and concerned about how much data, and what depth of data I could collect within the scheduled six-week fieldwork in Malaysia. However, because working in the field is unpredictable a good deal of the time, I needed to be prepared to adjust schedules, to be flexible about interview times and to be ready to add or subtract observations and interviews, to replace participants in the event of trauma or tragedy, and to rearrange the terms of original agreement and appointment (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Several meetings were cancelled and rescheduled at the last minute, especially with some of my participants: professionals, academics and social workers in the field of domestic violence. Fortunately, their diaries still allowed for reappointment during my fieldwork.

For my fieldwork at the refuge, I was fortunate that in both refuges the workers and residents were favourably hospitable. My concern about effective use of time with participants issues was rewarded. The people, both the workers and the residents, provided great hospitality. These absolutely complemented my fieldwork. Some insight into the shape of my study that was previously not apparent was uncovered through this fieldwork.

5.5.3 The Interview sample

Kvale (1996) recommended researchers to interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what the researchers need to know. However the number of subjects necessary depends on a study's purpose.

Domestic violence is a complex phenomenon for which no consensus can be found as to what and how the issues can be effectively and efficiently handled – yet we have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Therefore

deliberate effort is needed to ensure the validity of the data documented and observed (Stake, 1995).

In this study forty six (46) participants were willing and consented to be interviewed. I interviewed ten (10) residents and fifteen (15) ex residents of the two refuges. I also interviewed the service providers of the two refuges including social workers (10), who eagerly shared their experiences and opinion. Besides generating data from their point of view as service providers in the refuges, I also sought some clarification for better understanding and alternative explanations and opinion. I aimed to corroborate the same fact or phenomenon related to this study from the information of various people [professional] who have been working in the fields of domestic violence, directly or indirectly. Therefore, lecturers, academics, activist and other social workers (11 in total) in the field of domestic violence were also interviewed.

In selecting the number of interviewees, I was more concerned about accumulating data than with counting the number of participants. My focus was to investigate in detail the relationship of the women to their context (the refuges, the programme, the system, the people and the situation). Also to find out what they have in common, the consistent and recurrent patterns through intensive case study, at the same time examining the differences in their experiences.

Triangulation in qualitative data uses up resources, important data and claims will be deliberately triangulated (Stake, 1995). Stake further explained the importance of depending on our intent to bring understanding and meaning to the case. Also the researcher must be mindful of the extent to which any statement helps to clarify the story or make a distinction between conflicting meanings. Hence, the activists, key professionals and academicians who have worked on violence (see table 5.1 below on data collection) that I interviewed were, chosen for their relevance to the research question. Some of them were my existing contacts who work with domestic violence issues, and some were new contacts established through snowballing. While a few of them were rather reserved and discouraging, most of them were able and willing to give full interviews which interestingly ended with dialogues that were stimulating

and refreshing. Knowledge and experiences working with domestic violence issues was shared. Many other related issues were brought up and opened to further discussions in a dialectical and analytical manner. The issues discussed provided invaluable background information and ongoing commentaries related to my work.

5.6 The Interviews

In order to learn about domestic violence in a concrete, meaningful, and sensitive manner a reflexive and contextual form of interviewing should be employed. (Dobash and Dobash, 2002). The interviews formed the main part of my fieldwork and data collection. Kvale (1996) reminded us that:

“good interviews require expertise in both subject matter and human interaction. If assistants are to be hired to conduct some of the interviews, intensive training of these *new* interviewers may be required to obtain interviews of good quality” (pp.104).

I conducted all the interviews myself as I wanted to have the first hand information to enhance my knowledge and understanding of the study that I pursued. In addition, I organised, and scheduled my time for all the interview sessions. I am confident about my competence to conduct these interviews as I have done similar interviews in the past; master degree study (2001) and other similar research projects as part of my academic work. I learned to handle the emotional trauma of women being abused, through my previous training as a para counsellor in domestic violence since 1998 and my experience as a voluntary para counsellor at the “Crisis Center for Women Being Abused” (OSCC). The invaluable and continuous advice, support and guidance from my supervisors, Professor Marianne Hester and Professor Lesley Doyal helped further develop my skills and improve my competence throughout the process of this study.

The manager of one of the organisations asked to study my research questions during the process of obtaining clearance for the study site. This was communicated through emails. While I was particularly concerned about the organisational sensitivity, I also needed to ensure that the creation and refinement of the research questions met the directions of my study’s enquiries.

Kvale (1996) reminds researchers to conduct interviews based on an interview guide and with a reflective approach to the knowledge sought and the interpersonal reaction of the interview situation. In the qualitative interview, Mason (2002) similarly states that a pre-designed set and sequence of questions need to be prepared before the interview. Mason further argues that the qualitative researchers have to do this effectively and coherently and in ways which are consistent with their research question. This is to ensure that the interview interaction actually generates relevant data, which means “simultaneously orchestrating the intellectual and social dynamics of the situation” (pp.67).

As suggested by Patton (2002), in developing my research questions guideline, I began with an outline, listing all the broad categories that I felt relevant to my study. This preliminary listing allowed me to visualise the general format of the interview. I was particularly concerned about the specific ordering [sequencing], phrasing, and level of language and general style of the questions to suit to the educational, social and cultural levels of my participants. I was mindful about wording questions so as to provide relevant data. I was also cautious about my guiding questions so that I would be able to ask questions which would motivate the participants to answer as completely and honestly as possible. Through reading various research works in books and journals, reflection, critical thinking and guidance from my supervisors, complemented by my experience in research work, the research questions was designed (see appendices 3 to 6).

I used a semi structured, in-depth and interactive interview approach. Semi-structured interviews involve the implementation of a number of pre-determined questions. The predetermined questions serve as guidelines to smooth an interview process. Also the predetermined questions helped to ensure that I didn't miss any important questions. These questions were typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order. However, I was also mindful of allowing freedom of participants to digress and to go where the samples led as a mode of inquiry, in order to expand rather than to limit the studies inquiry, in the hope of providing important

insights and knowledge. Open questions allow the women to voice their accounts, to express views through their own interpretations and any other information they wish to share. On the other hand, I probed far beyond the prepared and standardised questions when I found that the issues were significant.

The interview timing was flexible and took thirty minutes to one hour. The purpose was to enable subjects that were important to the women and the workers to be explored, and to ensure comprehensiveness. Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002).

Like any interview, my interview process posed some challenges. Therefore I needed to ensure that these challenges, did not affect the quality and quantity of my data. For example as stated by Mason.

“At any one time you may be listening to what the interviewee(s) is or are currently saying and trying to interpret what they mean; trying to work out whether what they are saying has any bearing on ‘what you really want to know’” (pp.45-6).

For my study, I overcame this by clarifications and paraphrasing during each interview in order to establish shared meaning. Most of the face to face interviews where the interviewee consented were audiotape recorded. Using a tape recorder permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee (Patton, 2002). However in using interview tape it seemed impossible to capture the nonverbal cues. So, I made sure I scribbled notes on significant non verbal signs e.g. ‘moment of silence’ and tears, the women showing scars and bruises, certain facial expressions such as sadness, anger, frustration and so forth. In addition, field notes were also taken. Notes of key phrases, key terms and lists of major points made by the participants were also noted.

Kvale (1996) argues that specific forms of analysis, say, of the linguistic aspects of the interviews, require special competence. I did the interviews myself as I am familiar with the language commonly spoken in Malaysia. The interview was done in

“Malay” and English, depending on the fluency of the participant. The data was transcribed in the language as spoken. Later the themes were translated into English. I transcribed the data myself to ensure accuracy, as I believe only the interviewer has the “sense” of what meanings/feelings the interviewee is trying to communicate through verbal and also non verbal cues.

All interviews were face to face except for the fifteen ex clients who were content to be interviewed over the phone. This was my first experience of collecting data through a telephone interview. I was excited as there were plenty of ex clients who volunteered to be interviewed through the telephone. My access to the ex clients of the refuges was gained through the manager of the particular organisation. I was not only uncertain but also sceptical of how much data I could collect through telephone interview. Before each telephone interview, I prepared myself physically and psychologically for example having a cup of coffee before ringing the interviewee. It was a means of “readiness” to work through the medium of the telephone. I ensured that I remained calm myself as an interviewer. I had also to ensure that I could fluently question and probe the interviewees. After reading my research questions and repeatedly practising the line, shortly I realized that I had memorised the whole set of questions. I called my first interviewee at 1500 hours, 8 December 2005, as appointed. However for some personal reason, this interviewee requested me to call her back at 1600 hours, which I did. The interview with this first interviewee was incredibly successful. It was made possible by the interviewee’s willingness and capability to provide and share her experiences while at the refuge and thereafter. The effectiveness of the interview was enhanced by the interviewee’s bubbly attitude. This first experience of a telephone interview boosted my morale and confidence in handling the telephone interviews that followed.

5.7 Documents

A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of data. In addition to the interviews I collected and examined secondary data sources including relevant documents from both the refuges and other related organizations. Written materials and other documents included official publications

(letters, essays, newspaper cuttings) and reports, memoranda and correspondence (all type of archive materials, service records, personal records); photographs could be invaluable as each records and preserves context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003; Rigas, 1998). Because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection involving case studies. Systematic searches for relevant documents are important in any data collection plan (Yin 2003a). In conducting this study I spent time reading and collecting some related journals, books, newspapers clippings and annual reports from the WAO Resource Centre, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre (ARROWS), All Women's Action Society (AWAM) and Women's Centre for Change (in Penang), besides available documents from the refuges. The documents collected helped me to understand better the issues of domestic violence, its cultural context (in Malaysia), and could serve as multiple sources of evidence to the study.

Table 5.1: Data collection – methods and sources

Method	Sources of data
Interviews (semi structured, in-depth and interactive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Residents and ex-residents of the refuges ▪ Director of the refuge ▪ Manager of the refuge ▪ Social workers ▪ Representatives of Islamic Department Sarawak (JAIS) ▪ Representatives of Community and Social Welfare Department Sarawak ▪ Directors (women centre) ▪ Academician/Professional (social work, domestic violence) ▪ Staff nurse (one stop crisis centre)
Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Layout of refuges ▪ Activities in the refuges that include cooking, cleaning, washing, baking cakes & biscuits, handicraft, psycho-drama (a session), counselling (observed from a distance) ▪ Team briefings ▪ Preparations for talks and poster presentations ▪ Children's activities including games (indoor and outdoor), singing and dancing, religious classes ▪ Activities in the lounge; leisure hours
Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Domestic Violence Act Malaysia (1994) ▪ Refuges annual reports ▪ Other women centre reports ▪ The refuges' journals ▪ Research papers; domestic violence issues Malaysia ▪ Newspaper cuttings

5.8 Dealing with data

The analysis of data begins during the data collection. Indeed, as has been discussed by Patton (2002); Denzin and Lincoln (1998); Miles and Huberman (1994), the ideas for making sense of the data that emerge while one is still in the field constitute the initial analysis. This includes noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configuration and proposition. This was especially true during my data collection in Malaysia. My initial analysis began during each interview. I could sense during the interviews the women's feeling, emotions and apprehension - to name but a few. Also, each day after my interview session, and when I returned to the hotel room, I reflected on each interview, trying to capture the essence of what had been expressed by the interviewees. I quickly took notes on the ideas as they surfaced.

When I returned to my Department in the University of Bristol, UK, I had before me a mass of rich interview texts, notes and scribbles, documents, hunches and ideas, and so forth. I sensed the challenge, yet felt excited by the wide range of activities that I had anticipated, taking into account the organization and handling of data, working out whether it was possible to make enough sense of them for themes to emerge.

I initially used *NVIVO* to assist in the analysis of my data. I attended *NVIVO* classes to learn about using this software. As I progressed, I realized that I needed to translate all my data into one language. I was in a state of panic as my interview data was in a very mixed multi lingual form. I communicated my anxiety to my supervisor, and she advised me to leave the languages as they were. Keeping the language used by the participants preserves its nuances that are vital part of a qualitative research. My analyses might have been inadequate if I had to transcribe into a single language. In qualitative research subtle differences in the meaning of language used by the participants is very important. For example, the word "*hal rumahtangga*", repeatedly mentioned by the women in my study has a fine and delicate meaning in its context; significantly influenced by the culture and religion of that society. The nearest translation of the word *hal rumahtangga* to English would be "home as private sphere", which has its own appropriate meaning in the English context. When the

women talked about issues of *hal rumahtangga* in Malaysia in terms of a coping mechanism, they would prioritize turning to religion for guidance and support by prayer and meditation. However in some other parts of the world, this may not be the case.

I was aware that these situations led to another challenge in my data analysis process. I discovered that I had to use only one language if I was to use *NVIVO*. The *NVIVO* programme might help me to engage with and interpret the data, but it also constrained or limited my interpretation. *NVIVO* quantifies frequencies by recognizing influential codes. However, when using *NVIVO*, similar words or concepts will not be detected or it will miss the code and concepts because of the different language used by the participants.

By ‘calculated choice’ I turned to a more traditional type of analysis i.e. by manually analysed data. I found analysing data manually was the most appropriate method in my context. Basically my analysis aimed to provide greater ‘depth’ and ‘meaning’ in the remarks made by abused women in this study. The traditional approach was felt to be more relevant in my context. This was because I was acquainted with the varieties of ‘Malaysian’ language the participants used. So I had no problem with analysing the multi-lingual content of the data. I could quite easily detect the repetitive concepts or themes as I listened to the audio tapes. I could also detect the repetitive themes as I transcribed my data. How I finally arrived at and decided on the various themes in my study findings is described in stages as follows.

5.8.1 The process of analysis: interview data

Data analysis is the most important aspect of research work. It provides an investigative, and critical challenge to get the data to reveal and explain the phenomena and issues being studied. As argued by Mason (1996):

“the decisions to organise your data are not simply technical or administrative, but are ultimately part of your analytical strategy, and require you to engage fully with questions about the theoretical orientation of your study as well as the practical shape of your data” (pp.171).

It is to the illustrations of the steps that I have taken to analyse my data that we now turn.

Stages of analysis:

- Research questions and data
- Thematic questions from the interview
- Transcribing verbatim
- Coding
- Indexing categories
- Reinterpreting categories
- Creating new categories
- Final decision about indexing categories
- Emerging themes – identified

5.8.1.1 Research questions and data

Mason (1996, 2002) suggests that:

“all qualitative research should be constructed around an intellectual puzzle of some kind and should attempt to produce some kind of explanation of that puzzle, or an argument” (pp.18).

The interview questions and theoretical framework were used to generate a number of pre-existing themes and codes. My research questions guided my data analysis. My data provided an explanation for my research questions. I needed to focus my mind on these throughout the process of analysing my data. It was the mechanism of moving between my research questions and my data that led to the stages of analysis as illustrated as follows.

5.8.1.2 Thematic questions from the interview

In formulating my research questions and guidelines for my interview, I carefully thought through how to be systematic and consistent. Firstly, I distilled down my research questions into five themes of interrogation. These approaches not only

helped to ensure the smooth running of my interviews, it subsequently eased my data analysis process. As seen in table 5.2 below, I schematised my questions as (1) History of abuse, (2) First contact with the refuge, (3) During stay at the refuge, (4) Life after the refuge and, (5) Anything else the participants wanted to share about life at the refuge. There were of course other probing questions beneath the main thematic questions.

I transcribed all the interview data. I put together the data for all 25 (1) History of abuse for participants. I cross tabulated data between participants. In this way, it was easy for me to see any similarities of pattern of behaviour, and also conflicting experiences and opinions between the various sets of data. It made me stay focused on the theme under study. How I transcribed my data is as follows.

Table 5.2: Questions are thematised as:

1) History of abuse	2) First contact with the refuge	3) During stay at refuge	4) Life after refuge	5) Anything else the participants want to share about life at the refuge
Participant's response • Bla • Bla • Bla	Participant's response • Bla • Bla • Bla	Participant's response • Bla • Bla • Bla	Participant's response • Bla • Bla • Bla	Participant's response • Bla • Bla • Bla

5.8.1.3 Transcribing verbatim

I prepared a table in columns using heading such as “dialogue, code, keynote and interpretation” (see table 5.3). As stated earlier, I transcribed the data myself. I retained the language as spoken. As I listened to the tapes and transcribed verbatim, I stayed focused on the women’s stories. During this process of transcriptions I took note of some keywords, and/or significant statements and copied and pasted them under the column ‘keynotes’. I interpreted the keynotes and the interpretations were *scribbled* under the ‘interpretation’ column. This step usually happened

simultaneously with transcribing as I was familiar with the women's stories having conducted the entire interviews myself. I compared my interview notes of observations and reflections on non verbal data with my interview data verbatim, to produce a vivid written description of the experience. I believe these processes provide more depth than would have been achieved with only a single source of data collection and analysis.

On reflection, while I analysed the data by listening to the tape again and again with the transcription, I wish I could go back to the women and probe for some more information. I recognized that I was facing constraint on resources because of the geographical distance; the women in my studies being in Malaysia and my analysis and writing phases in the UK.

I read and re-read for meaning following a hermeneutic approach that emphasizes interpretation and context. In this approach, I need to establish context and meaning for what the participants say and do (Patton, 2002).

“The goal is to discover essences and to reveal those essences. The case and the key issues need to be kept in focus, the search for meanings, the analysis, should roam out and return to those foci over and over” (Stake, 1995, pp.85).

When I finished the process of transcribing, I interpreted the keynotes and began coding, and this marked the initial process of codifying my data.

Table 5.3: Sample of transcription

DIALOGUE	CODE	KEYNOTE	INTERPRETATION
<p>P: Emm, I feel as what I told you lah ... I feel macam confidence meningkat, self esteem meningkat, whereby last time Ifeel so down, I always think about I think I can't do this thing, I think I can't manage to do all this thing, I am not a good person, whereby...last time when I was working that time, people said I was aggressive [firm], quite independent, infact very independent you know, active..lots of activities, but once I married yunno, I am not that active anymore, I was a full time housewife, at home all the time. So ..and when I want to do something he always, my husband will say, you think you can do it, always look down on me, so that's where my esteem and confidence level menurun until sampai nak tulis [isi] form pun I rasa I tak ada confidence, see.</p> <p>R: Maksud you, you rasakan confidence level deteriorates sejak 6 tahun berkahwin?</p> <p>P: Macam I rasa I am stupid. Macam I rasa I ni bodohlah. A..I rasa tahap tu lah. Apa yang I buat I rasa bodoh. That's why I cakap my self confidence tu sangat menurun. Bila I datang sini, I rasa macam confidence level I tu meningkat.</p> <p>R: When did you realize that your confidence level improves again?</p> <p>P: I think about a month...after a month staying here. I don't know about other people lah kan. For myself I keep on asking to myself, so day by day I am thinking and checking myself...and my confidence level it seem like I think now that my confidence is better.</p> <p>R: emm..go on</p> <p>P: Ya...kat sini pun support group programme , I was telling you about improving self esteem, whereby they have a program how to a...access your level of esteem and they teach you all that.</p>	<p>↑ Loss of esteem and confidence</p> <p>↓</p> <p>↑ Confidence</p> <p>↓</p> <p>↑ Support programme</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>once I married you know, I am not that active anymore, I was a full time housewife, at home all the time. So ..and when I want to do something he always, my husband will say, you think you can do it, always look down</p> <p>...sampai nak tulis [isi] form pun I rasa I tak ada confident</p> <p>Bila I datang sini, I rasa macam confident level I tu meningkat.</p>	<p>Recognised changes</p> <p>Husband belittle</p> <p>Importance of support programme and activities</p>

5.8.1.4 Coding

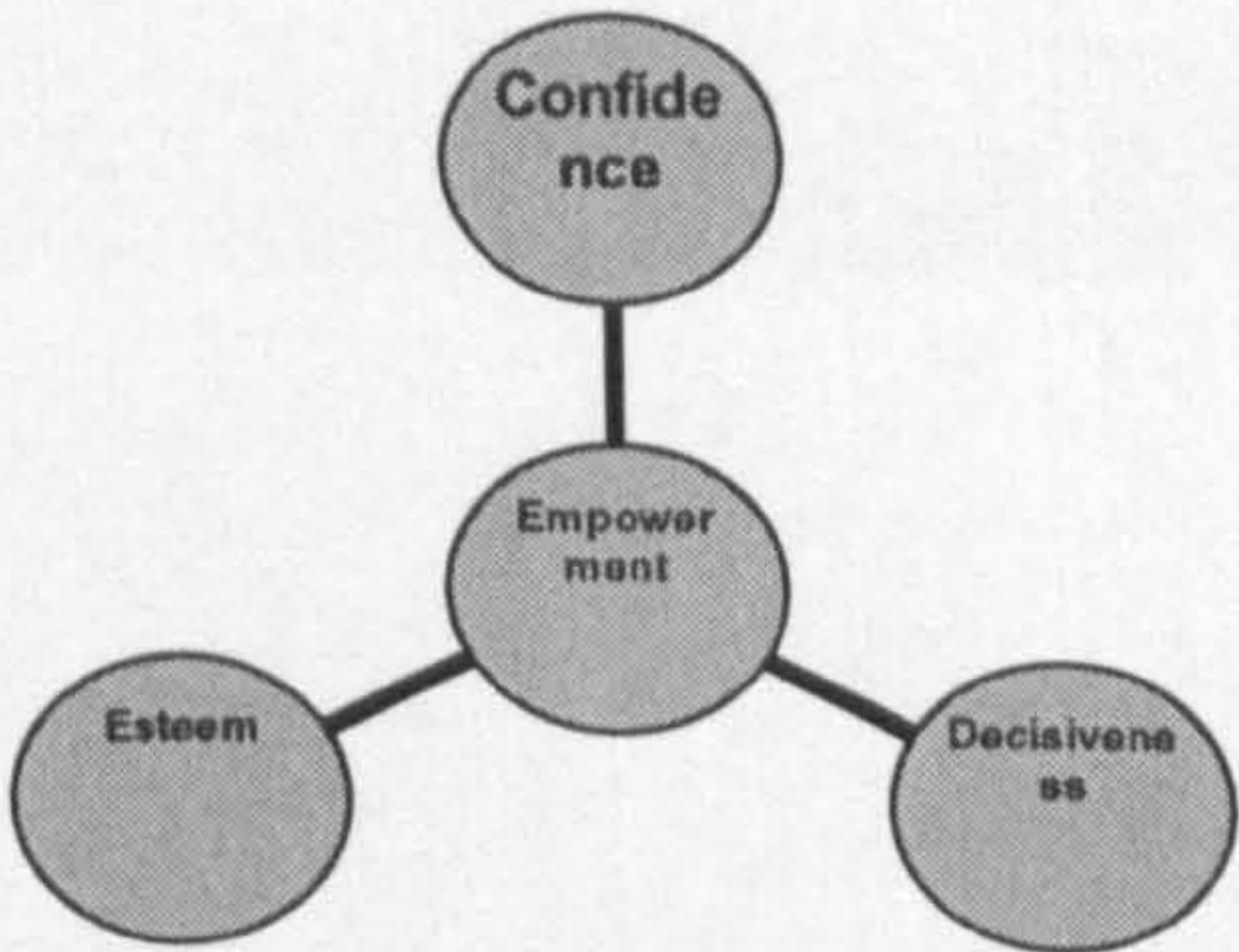
This study has adopted the view of Miles and Huberman that ‘coding is analysis’ (1994, pp.56). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that the purpose of coding is to

notice relevant phenomena by relating them to the research questions, to collect example of these phenomena and to analyse them in order to find similarities, differences, patterns and structures. They further describe that the stuff of analysis is to review a set of field notes, transcribe, scrutinize and interpret them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact. This part of analysis involves differentiating and combining the retrieved data and reflecting on this information.

In this study, I established the unit of analysis in the form of keynotes as explained in 4.8.1.3 above. The unit of analysis ranged from words, phrases, sentences and or whole paragraph as they were transcribed verbatim. Usually at this stage, I attributed a single code to each of the units that I analysed (see table 5.3). Some codes were created at the start of my analysis, while others followed. I found out that the coding seemed to be descriptive during the initial analysis, and later developed into one that was more inferential.

By the time I completed the transcription, interpretation and coding of the data, I had created arrays and hundreds of codes. At this early stage of data interpretation, the codes can be provisional. I studied the relationship of these codes and grouped together similar codes that appeared “like with like” in terms of commonalities and patterns as seen in the figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Sample : codes



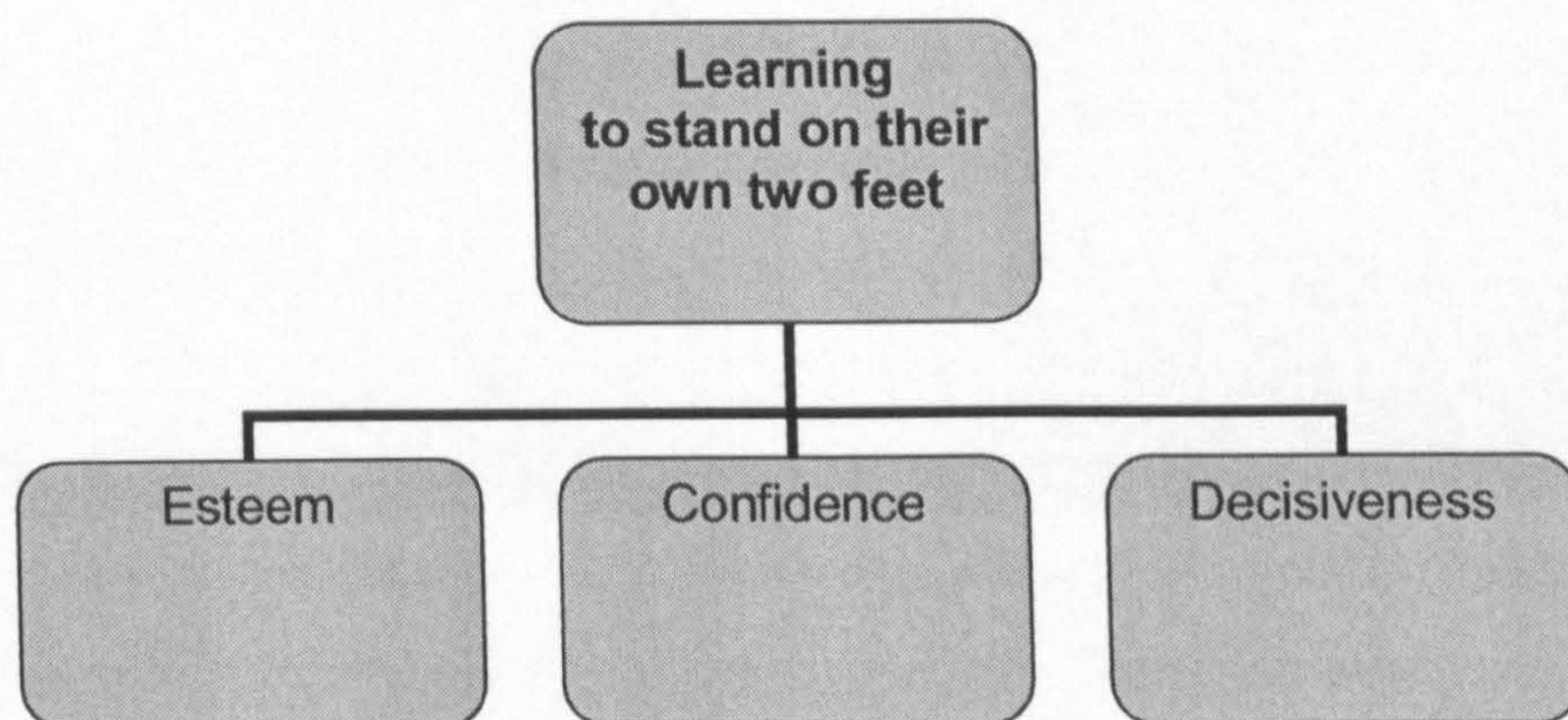
5.8.1.5 Indexing categories

“Categories have conceptual power because they pull together around them other groups of concepts or subcategories” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp.65). Strauss and Corbin argue that the name of the categories the researcher chooses is usually the one that seems logically related to the data it represents, and should be graphic enough to remind us quickly of its referent.

During my process of analysis, as I proceeded with coding and categorising, I noticed that “some name from the pool of concepts that I already have in my discipline and professional readings” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp.68) emerged. In this way the literature added to developing my categories. This helped to develop my confidence in the process of data analysis. Besides these kinds of literature-derived concepts, I also noticed that some concepts from my previous study emerged. For example, the women’s accounts in this study repeatedly mentioned about the issues of *hal rumah tangga*” (home as a private sphere).

I distinguished the function of categories in the same manner as heading and subheadings in the chapters of a book, giving a descriptive sense of what each section of text was about. In this study, I developed the category by putting the codes that I grouped together as explained in the above stages. Then I named this as properties of a category. For example as seen in the figure 5.2 below, I named a category as “Learning to stand on their own two feet” for properties that included “esteem, confident, decisiveness”. As I moved on to analyse my data, more categories were created. At this stage some categories were descriptive, while other categories were inferential. However, all categories were given a name that was provisional.

Figure 5.2 **Sample: category**



5.8.1.6 Reinterpreting categories

In reinterpreting categories, I repeated the stages as above that include:

- Coding
- Indexing categories
- Listen and relisten to the tape for stratified meanings
- Refer again transcription list

“Coding represents the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp.67).

During the course of analysis, the predefined theme guide, and the post-defined codes changed and developed. Some codes worked; other decayed. Some codes flourished, sometimes too much. In some instances, I noticed that I assigned too many segments to the same codes. This difficulty called for a breaking down of codes, to sub codes, or breaking down of categories.

5.8.1.7 Creating new categories

In creating new categories, I also repeated the stage as above that included:

- Coding

- Indexing categories
- Listen and relisten to the tape for stratified meanings
- Refer again transcription list

By this stage, I had a mass collection of a system of categories. I was engaged with analysis of the collected categories, trying to arrive at my final decision about indexing categories.

5.8.1.8 Final decision about indexing categories

In order to arrive at the final decision about indexing categories, I repeated the following stages:

- Coding
- Indexing categories
- Listen and relisten to the tape for stratified meanings
- Refer again transcription list

The data analysis was an on-going process. As argued by Miles and Huberman (1994),

“data analysis is a continuous iterative enterprise. Issues of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/ verification come into figure successively as analysis episodes follow each other. But other issue are always part of the ground” (pp.11).

During my data analysis process, it was always ‘there’ in my thinking: while I showered, when I had meals, during jogging and so forth. The only time I remember that I didn’t analyse my data was when I slept. Otherwise the process went on and on in a ‘necessary obsessive and compulsive’ manner. I found that this process led to stratification of analysis. It made the process of categorising and re-categorising and indexing of categories more stimulating rather than a task or chore. From time to time, I discussed my analysis with my supervisors and at this stage, what appeared vague at first became increasingly explicit.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that coding and recoding are over when the analysis itself appears to have run its course – when all

the incidents can be readily classified, categories are saturated and sufficient number of regularities emerge. For this study, I stopped the analysis process when I noticed that all the women's significant accounts were classified, coded, categories saturated and adequate number of regularities emerged. By this stage, I had developed some provisional themes for this study.

5.8.1.9 Provisional emerging themes

The interview questions and theoretical frameworks were used to generate a number of themes and sub themes. The qualitative coding process allowed themes and observations to emerge inductively from the text. At this stage I named all themes as "provisional emerging themes" as I embarked into another stages of analysis; triangulating with other documents and notes.

5.8.1.10 The process of analysis: triangulating with other documents and notes

All other materials and documents were examined to produce a comprehensive analysis in line with the aims and objectives of this study. The different sources of data were scrutinized to identify patterns of variables involving similarities and differences, structured meanings, contextual interpretations of data and that was coded according to the theme. Each theme for analysis was relatively easy to find with the help of my question guidelines that were prepared and typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order. As stated by Stake (1995):

"often the pattern will be known in advance, drawn from the research questions, serving as a template for the analysis. Sometimes, the patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis" (pp.78).

5.8.1.11 Emerging themes

Emerging themes were identified. The findings were illustrated through the most appropriate, relevant and significant excerpt, as extracted and presented in chapters 6, 7, 8, 9.

5.9 Validity and reliability

In Quantitative paradigms the nature of knowledge is rationalistic. In Qualitative paradigms the nature of knowledge is naturalistic. It cannot use statistical text. Qualitative research is based on the continuous process of the study which will result in a more in-depth unique-complex understanding of the individual. This is done through the interview process of the participants or observations that are triangulated with other information from literature and documents. Qualitative analysis is to contribute to a process of revision and enrichment of understanding. Qualitative analysis process keeps searching for codes, creating categories and finding themes.

Because of the differences in the qualitative paradigm as compared with that of quantitative, each requires paradigm-specific criteria for addressing validity and reliability.

In qualitative inquiry the question of trustworthiness or rigour has been widely raised since the 1980s because of its subjective nature. There were specific methodological strategies to demonstrate qualitative rigour. Profound qualitative figures like Guba and Lincoln (1981,1982), Lincoln and Guba (1985) for example, substituted reliability and validity with the similar concepts ie credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Others like Sandelowski (1986), Patton (2002), Miles and Huberman (1994), Kvale (1996) followed the concept introduced by Guba and Lincoln. Amongst the concepts that these authors and researchers suggested includes “relevance, self awareness, internal coherence, validity, triangulation and reflexivity”.

I am inclined to agree with Morse et al. (2002) that “reliability and validity remain appropriate concepts for attaining rigor in qualitative research”. Morse et al. suggested the following:

“qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies integral and self-correcting during the conduct of inquiry itself. Within the conduct of inquiry itself, verification strategies that ensure both reliability and validity of data are

activities such as: *“ensuring methodological coherence, sampling sufficiency, developing a dynamic relationship between sampling, data collection and analysis, thinking theoretically, and theory development”*(pp.11).

In the context of this study reliability and validity can be verified in the following ways:

- I ensured that the methodological approach was coherent with that of the method. This was presented in 5.2 (methodological rationale) and 5.3 (the case study approach). The methodology and the approach led to the design of the method discussed in 5.4 to 5.8.2.
- I stopped collecting data when I noticed that my interview data had reached saturation, which convinced me that the sampling was sufficient.
- I employed various strategies to answer my research questions (see 5.6 and 5.7). I made the effort to develop a dynamic relationship between sampling and the data collection. The data was gathered through the methodological, informational and cultural means. This was done through interview and observations. I also used various means of collecting data and that included visits to sites and documentation and archival records. The data converged in a triangulating fashion. The various data helped to validate one form of data with the other. As argued by Rigas (1998), triangulation mainly includes the use of a variety of measures and analysis to contribute to the reliability and validity of the case study. This kind of triangulation is referred to by Rigas (1998) as triangulation of data.
- The process of analysing the data as presented in 5.8 enabled me to conduct the process of revision and enrichment of my understanding of the data. The qualitative analysis process I employed required me to keep searching for codes, categories and themes.
- In this research study, the inductive process involved developed my understanding of the women's plights and contexts. This suggests that I embarked

on the study with some phenomena and ended it with in-depth meaning and understanding.

5.10 Conclusion

One of the aims of my study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the abused women's experiences and contexts. In order to do so, I decided upon various methods and approaches for data collection and analysis. According to Rigas (1998),

“It is widely known that qualitative research is time-consuming for the researchers both at the stage of data collection and categorization and at that of data analysis and the final write up of the study, because of their obligation to present a thorough analysis of the social phenomenon being studied” (pp. 234-235),

I believe this study has managed to present a complete picture of the abused women's lives in this study.

Having discussed the methodology and methods of this research study, the next question that needs to be answered is “What is the nature of evidence of the participants' experiences in the context of the study?” It is therefore to these questions and issues that we shall turn in the next four chapters.

Chapter 6 Two Refuges

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the concepts of refuge, followed by a brief overview of refuge provision in Malaysia. Next I present the findings of my fieldwork on the two refuges in the study. This includes how the two refuges started, their philosophy and objectives, characteristics of their residents, the model of the refuges and how they operate; the running of refuges, programmes and activities and follow up support. This chapter also describes the barrier to their progress.

6.2 Refuges

In Haaken & Yragui's (2003) discussion of *conflicting perspectives on domestic violence shelter practices*, they focus on the social, symbolic and survival value of space for abused women. The refuge is seen as:

“a social category that establishes a boundary between danger and safety, between protectors and predators. The creation of a refuge also suggests a moral responsibility to act - a mandate to protect the vulnerable (the good) from sources of threat (the bad)” (pp.52).

This concept seems to fit well with the main aims of the refuges in my study. Refuges provide safety and shelter, besides helping women to develop awareness of themselves as survivors, building their self esteem and confidence through self help with the ultimate goal of empowering themselves. As Lupton and Gillespie (1994) argue, ‘refuges are places not just for safety, but also to help women understand their experiences of being abused and to see the possibility of not being the “victim”’. Most refuges are committed to non-hierarchical and collectivist ways of working and to the principles of self-help and self-determination. Refuges endeavour to work ‘with’ the women rather than working ‘for’ the women.

Dobash & Dobash (2002) describe the refuge as a place that provides an almost unique opportunity for creating a change for women. Refuges not only assist those who have been abused but also stretch beyond those who seek refuge to wider society. Refuge is a provision of a physical space thoroughly enmeshed in the

problem and in the lives of the women. In addition the work of a refuge and its staff is unique for most social movements, and it is doubtful that a movement, rather than just a provision of service, could have developed or been sustained without it.

For Thoele (1996), the concepts of a 'refuge' seem simple. "A refuge is a safe harbor in which to rest and be replenished" (Thoele, pp.34). She describes a refuge as a place to gather courage and strength, and the balance to live daily life creatively. Many women fleeing violence are deprived of safe and affordable refuges. They cannot afford to be independent economically, emotionally and socially. Instead they must rely on the help and support provided by a non-profit-making refuge to begin to refresh their life.

In Malaysia all the six refuges run by non statutory agencies are situated in the west of the country: one in Kuala Lumpur (PJTK) is run by a private individual, three in Selangor are respectively run by the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), National Council of Women Organisation (NCWO) /YWCA of Klang and the HELP Home by a church. Those in Negeri Sembilan, and in Penang are run by the Women's Centre for Change. The geographical situation of these refuges means that help is available in the north, centre and south of West Malaysia. (See appendix 7).

As discussed in Chapter 3 there are other designated government refuges established by the Welfare Department under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development. While these refuges do accommodate women, they are not exclusively for domestic violence survivors (Josiah, 2002). In Kelantan, for example, shelters are not only for abused women but are also for others needing support (Rashidah and Hawa). Likewise in East Malaysia, there is a welfare home known as "Rumah Seri Kenanga, Batu 12".

This home has operated since 1996 and is meant for the elderly who are homeless and have no relatives to take care of them. However, because of the demand, two of the rooms have been allocated for use by abused women and their children. The rooms serve as a temporary shelter for the women, not to break the cycle of violence, but for

a “cooling off period” (Esah¹⁰, professional). Should the women need counselling, they will be referred to the social welfare department. The social worker will also assist the women to make police reports, and refer them to medical, or any other related agencies if necessary. The women and their children are allowed to stay for a maximum of three weeks. There is no other activity or program, except for the very basic routines like meal preparation and general cleaning.

Malaysia has a total population of 26 million with over 3000 incidents of domestic violence reported in 2005. But this is the tip of an iceberg, and with only six refuges, Malaysia has a very long way to go in providing effective help and assistance to abused women. In response to the lack of a protection network for women and their children living with the perpetrators of violence, the Ministry of Health in 1993, established ‘One Stop Crisis Centres’ (OSCC) specifically to address their need. These have now been set up in 90% of the government hospitals in Malaysia (Hii, 2001, Amin, 1998).

The OSCC aspires to capture the synergy of pooling services from both government and non government agencies. This is done through an official institutional response model, which coordinates the police, legal services, social welfare services, religious department, and refuges (where available) with the hospital in which it is based (Hii, 2001). However OSCC’s can only accommodate emergency cases for a night or two and help with crisis management in practical ways using the medical model (Putit, 2001). Psychosocial aspects of abuse are defined as outside the framework of intervention.

In the OSCC, the doctor will conduct a general examination on the survivor. The ‘sickness’ will be diagnosed and any physical evidence of violence will be treated and documented. Where relevant, the survivors will be referred to appropriate departments for gynaecological and forensic examination which is helpful in

¹⁰ The participant’s names are being changed throughout this thesis. This is to ensure privacy and confidentiality. All participants other than the women and the social workers in the refuge are addressed as professionals.

facilitating the legal proceedings in court where documentation to provide evidence is required (Putit 2001, Hii, 2001). The psychological distress will be referred to the psychiatric unit. Further management of any other problems will be dealt with by the medical social worker who will coordinate with other relevant agencies [GOs and NGOs] where necessary.

Studies from a number of different countries suggest that many women who present to emergency departments are not identified as having been abused and thus, they do not receive appropriate care (Fanslow, Norton, Robinson, Spinola, 1998; Robert, O'Toole, Raphael, Lawrence, Ashby, 1996; Abbot, Johnson, Koziol-McLain, Lowenstein, 1995; Campbell, Plika, Taylor, Sheridan, 1994; Campbell, 1992; Mc Leer, Annuar, Herman, Maguiling, 1989). Indeed Stark and Flitcraft (1996) have argued that the medical response to abuse directly contributes to the isolation and entrapment that exemplify the battering syndrome. The structural constraints of a busy urban emergency department [often also a training institution] may lead not only to non-detection and non-intervention but, more importantly, lack of receptiveness and response by health care providers to the issues that the women struggle with. Fanslow et al. (1998) have criticised emergency department staff for treating the immediate medical and surgical problems without attending to the prevention of future abuse. My personal observations of emergency settings in Malaysia present a similar picture though further research into the work of OSCCs is needed to confirm this and evaluate their services.

6.3 Refuge 1 and refuge 2

This chapter explores the two refuges in Malaysia that agreed to participate in my study. The fieldwork for this study was conducted from December 2005 to January 2006. The study examines the similarities and differences between the two refuges. It explores how the organizations were established and the difference in their philosophy and objectives and their approaches to the issues of domestic violence and the women survivors. Not much work has been done specifically about the way refuges are run in Malaysia, although the refuges are open to research, media and discussion. This openness created a space for my study to explore their settings and

practices, along with listening to the voices of the residents and the ex residents. There is impressionistic evidence through the literature that refuges do ‘good’, and I wanted to examine the reality of these statements.

Both refuges in the study have an open door policy to welcome women in need of their vital resources, including safety, food and all the activities of daily living to meet individual needs. Although donations from the women are encouraged, the stays are free of charge.

Both refuges are autonomous and independent organizations. Both are non statutory voluntary agencies, primarily funded by public donations including foundations, banks, women’s associations, corporations, overseas aid agencies and individuals. Fundraising is an ongoing task for both refuges.

6.3.1 How refuge 1 and refuge 2 started

Refuge 1 was founded by its current director Mak Pah¹¹ as a result of her own personal experience. Her husband left her eight years ago and in the early years following this, her life was very difficult. She sought refuge at the ‘Baitulmal refuge’ [one of the Muslim refuges in Malaysia]. Her perspectives of life changed as she observed other women living in desperation at the home. The courage that these women portrayed was remarkable. Reflecting on others who were in the same boat motivated Mak Pah to begin thinking about establishing a refuge of her own. Her dream materialised in 1998, with help, support and encouragement by friends and neighbours. Her personal experience was a ‘call to help others’ as she emphasized during my interview with her that was also reported in Zunaidah, 2005.

Refuge 1 is based in a privately rented property. It is an ordinary detached family house with its structure and space confined to the standard used by the Kuala Lumpur City Council. It is large by comparison with an average family house, with an office, five huge bedrooms, three bathrooms, sitting room, a spacious kitchen with attached dining area, another dining area, a patio and big garden. Though refuge 1 is large, it is

¹¹ Mak Pah is not the participant’s real name.

overcrowded, like most refuges in other parts of the world (Hague and Malos 2005; Levison and Harwin, 2000; Dobash and Dobash, 2002). In the early years Binney, Harkell and Nixon (1981) reported that:

“one of the most striking features about refuges in the UK was the number of women and children living in the home at one time, frequently crammed with beds and personal belongings of the families. The bedroom standard of occupation used by local authorities in allocating council property, was exceeded in nearly every refuge” (Binney et al. 1981, pp.30).

The founding of refuge 2 started with recognition of the plight of abused women by a core group of volunteers. Refuge 2 recognised that in the 1970s, domestic violence was silent behind closed doors. Women being abused by their husband or partner had to endure it by using various coping strategies, in the hope of preserving the “together-ness” of the relationships in their family (Putit, 2001). The plight of these women was exacerbated by the general beliefs and practices that one should not interfere with what was perceived as a “family affair” (Putit, 2001; Kee 2002).

In this climate, the late Tun Tan Siew Sin [a male Samaritan] recognised the need for a safe place for these women and donated RM30,000.00 cash to start the ball rolling. Puan Sri E.N. Chong headed a committee to establish the first shelter in Malaysia, and a core group of volunteers was formed. Together they formulated refuge 2 operating principles of self-help and self determination (Kee 2002). In June 1982, refuge 2 received temporary registration as a society and single storey house was rented as refuge 2’s centre that functions both as refuge and office premises. Like refuge 1, it became overcrowded. It has provided shelter to more than 1,600 women, and provided counselling calls to at least 22,000. Naturally the demand for staff increased. When the refuge first operated in 1982, only one member of staff was employed but the number gradually increased. Currently there are seventeen full time staff (Kee 2002).

6.3.2 Philosophical approach and objectives

The philosophical approach underpinning refuge 1, as expressed by its founder, Mak Pah is that “life has to go on”. She further stated “*Semakin dirinya bersemangat meringankan beban orang lain, semakin hilang derita dan pahit kehidupannya*” [The more I help others, the better I feel] Mak Pah December 2005, Zunaidah, 2005, pp.19). PJTK objectives are as follows:

- to draw a ‘genuine smile’ in survivors [women and children]
- to increase the women’s self esteem
- to increase the women’s confidence and
- to empower the women

Humble, yet practical, the PJTK has proved to be a harmonious and cheerful ‘home’ to its residents.

The services, provided through family oriented approaches, are crucial to the women’s personal well-being, as well as preparing them to be independent in facing their future. However, these approaches seem to be narrowly focused on individual women developing their ‘self’. Their failure to combat wider violence against women by campaigning and social action is apparent. The philosophy seems to underplay the role of others, including perpetrators and their environment, and is rehabilitative rather than preventative.

With the mission to create a society that upholds the principles of gender equality, where all women enjoy their human rights in every sphere, refuge 2 is more robust in its approach. Refuge 2 believes that:

- No one deserves to be battered
- Violence against women is a crime and a violation of human rights
- No man is entitled to control or abuse any women
- Women are not responsible for a man’s violent behavior
- Men are responsible for their own abusive and violent behaviors

- Social practices and attitudes that support any forms of violence against women must be challenged and eradicated

(Ivy, 2002, pp.3)

Refuge 2 believes that every woman has the right to self determination and that women have the capacity to be independent (Ivy, 2002). Ivy further argues that the two principles of self-help and self-determination draw their inspiration from a feminist philosophy that encourages women to decide for themselves what they want and what they need (pp.9). This is expressed in their published objectives:

- To provide, on request to women and their children suffering from mental, physical and sexual abuse, temporary refuge service that empowers them and enables them to determine their own future
- To offer emotional and social support to any women and their children who request such support, resident or otherwise, and offer support and after-care
- To create awareness and better understanding among individuals, public and relevant agencies on the issues of violence against women and the underlying inequalities
- To undertake and advocate with government and non-government organizations the eradication of factors that contribute to the inequality and subordination of women through law, policy and institutional reforms

Refuge 2 adopts a more holistic approach to combating prejudice and injustice than refuge 1, including both the individual self help approach and a mass approach in challenging and eradicating domestic violence. Its services and advocacy are run by professional, dedicated and enthusiastic staff members. They have established good working relationships with government agencies, statutory and non-statutory bodies. They are viewed as an organization with vast knowledge on women's issues and resources and the capacity to take on new and challenging issues (WAO, 2002). Refuge 2 has been active in providing direct services, seeking multiple approaches for implementing change and lobbying for legislative action. It was a pioneer member of

the Joint Action Group for violence against women that lobbied for the Domestic Violence Act 1994, and its implementation in 1996. Refuge 2 is significantly involved in developing the nation's policy on violence against women through seminars, conferences and workshops.

It is important to recognize that both refuges focus only on women and children as survivors. There is no mention of how to deal with perpetrators who are crucial as the source where the story of the domestic violence hurricane begins.

6.4 Characteristics of the women in the refuges

In refuge 1, most residents were Malaysian with a minority being Indonesian. In refuge 2, more than three-quarters of the residents were Malaysian (2001 = 76%; 2002 = 80%). Others were immigrants from Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, India, Iraq, Cambodia and Australia).

The residents of refuge 1 were mostly Malay with some Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indian. Most of the residents were Muslim. This enabled them to offer Islamic teaching and learning activities through professional volunteers within the organization as well as reading the Quran to the children.

In refuge 2, most of its residents were Indian (63% in 2001 and 55% in 2002), followed by Malays (30% in 2001 and 31% in 2002). They were mostly Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist and with some Muslims.

The residents in both refuges were mostly in their 20s and 30s with a few in their 40s. The participants that volunteered to be interviewed for this study ranged from 21 to 49 years.

There was no record of marital relationship available for refuge 1. However from my data, most residents were married, with just a few separated and divorced. In refuge 2 as well, the majority of the residents were legally married (57% in 2001 and 50% in 2002) with the rest divorced or separated, and just 7% married through customary

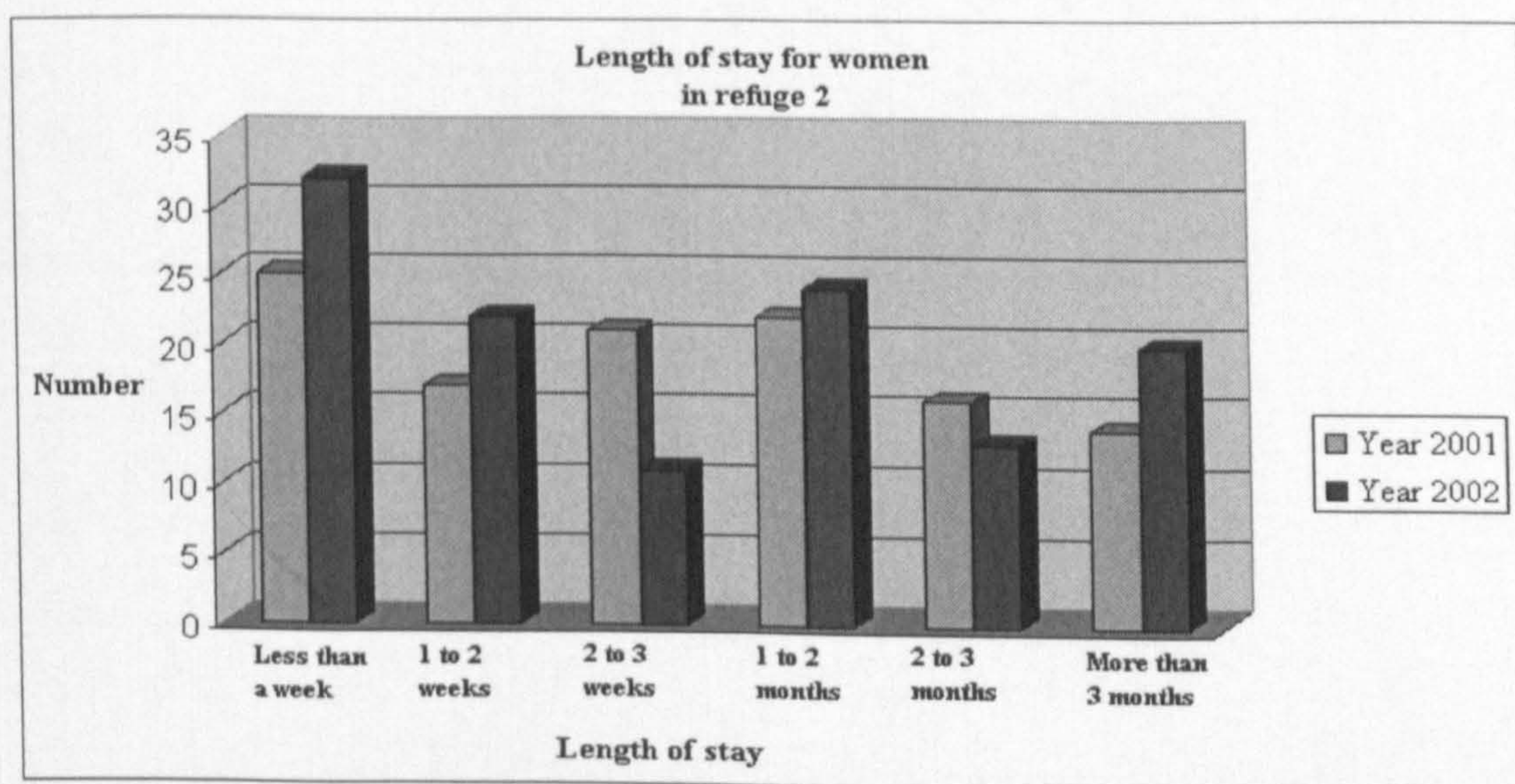
rites i.e. cultural ceremony. There was no mention of polygamous practice amongst the women I interviewed.

The majority of the women in both refuges had been in the same relationship between one and ten years. However there were a minority who had stayed longer before seeking help and support.

The length of time women stay in the refuges is varied. In both refuges, the women and children can stay from one night to several months. There are no proper records for length of stay available from refuge 1. However it seemed that the length of stay ranged from few months to a couple of years, making the home less spacious.

Most women in refuge 2 stayed for periods between less than a week to more than three months. In both 2001 and 2002, the highest percentage of the women stayed less than a week with 21.7% (n=25) in 2001 and 26.2% (n=32) in 2002. 19.1% (n=22) in 2001 and 19.7% (n=24) in 2002 who stayed in the refuges for 1 to 2 months. The figures below were extracted from the annual report 2002 of refuge 2 which shows the “Length of stay and number of stays for women in refuge 2”.

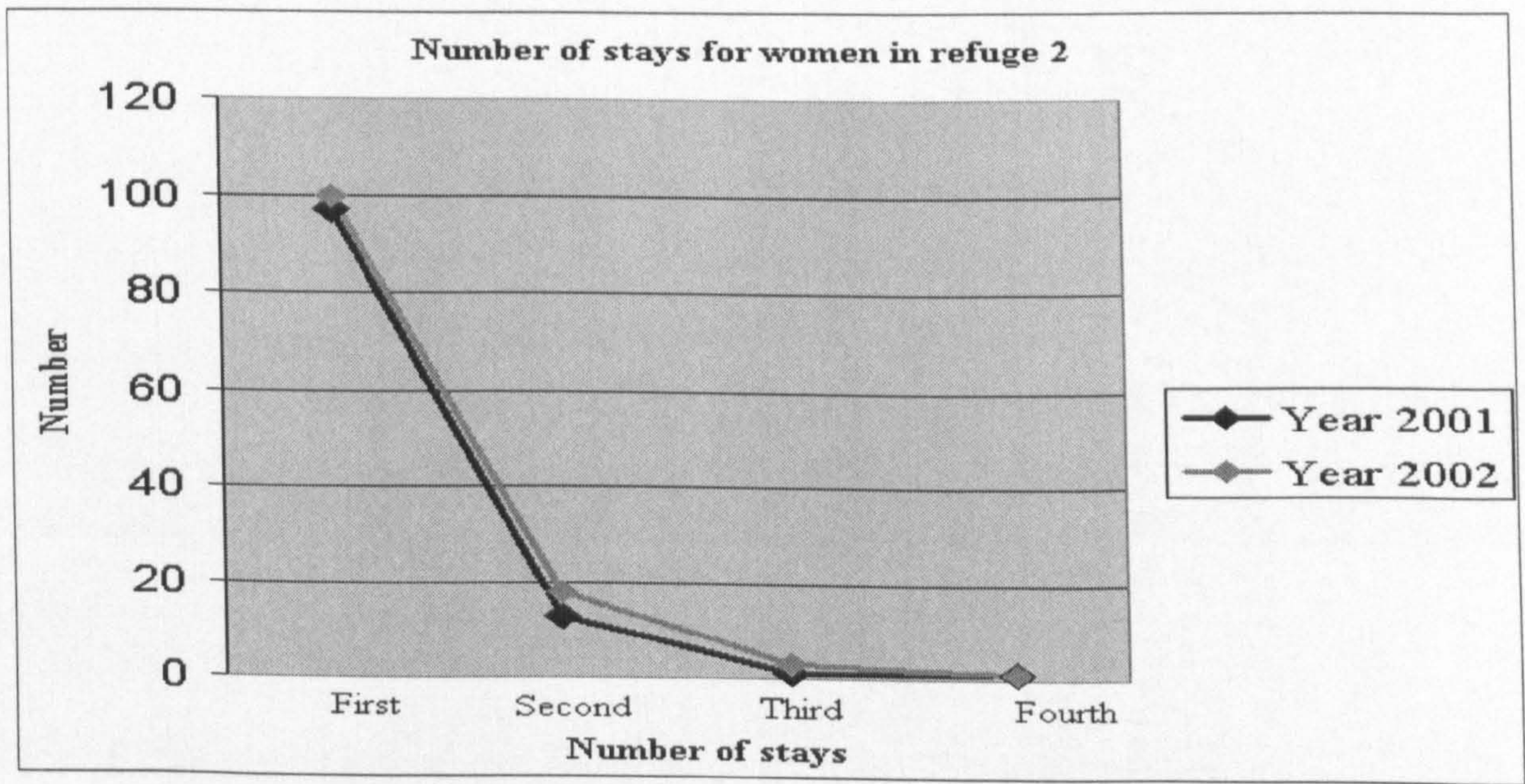
Figure 6.1: Length of stay for women in refuge 2



The relatively greater length of stay for women in refuge 1 could be due to the pleasant family environment in the refuge making the women feel at home, and the close bonding among its residents. On the other hand, perhaps the longer stay could be due to the women taking a longer time to gain their self esteem and confidence to leave the refuge: whether to return home or leave their husband. Some may return several times, usually for shorter periods.

There seemed to be no proper record of return cases in refuge 1. In refuge 2 the figure 6.2 shows the number of return cases. Overall, the number of women's stays in the refuge increased from 115 in 2001 to 122 in 2002. While most women stay only once at the refuge 2, a few may return several times. For example the highest is in 2002, where 18 women out of 122 sought shelter for the second time followed by 3 women in 2002, for the third time. However there is no data to show that, if any, differences there may be between these women.

Figure 6.2: Number of return cases for women in refuge 2



6.5 Model of the refuges

Both refuges practice an ‘open door’ policy. They welcome any woman who is experiencing partner violence regardless of age, ethnicity, religion and class. Also it

was noted during the interviews that both refuges are unable to accommodate women with any communicable disease such as HIV, tuberculosis and diarrhea, as they are not equipped to manage such problems.

Refuge 1 is an open refuge with a published address. It practices the 'open model' similar to Chiswick Women's Aid established by Erin Pizzey in England in 1971 (Hague and Malos, 2005; Haaken & Yragui, 2003; Dobash and Dobash, 2002). The advantages of the open model are many. It makes the refuge a welcoming place for the needy. It accommodates not only abused women, but also single parents, orphans [at refuge 1 children centre] and disabled people.

While friendly and approachable, the open shelter model creates the risk of easy access by perpetrators. Indeed Mak Pah was once attacked by one of the husbands who also attacked his wife. After that isolated occurrence, the law enforcement agency and refuge 1's neighbours have increased voluntary vigilance around the refuge. Police cars are commonly seen patrolling the area and with the premises being fenced, there have not been any more intruders. Haaken & Yragui (2003), argue that neighbourhood-watch programmes can be organized around the idea that tighter communities are more resistant to interpersonal violence than communities where individuals are isolated from one another. A major benefit of publishing the location for the refuge was therefore that it invited community support and protection of the residents and staff.

Refuge 2, on the other hand, conceals the location of its refuge. Refuge 2's address is not published, reflecting a stronger emphasis on separating women from men and protecting them from being traced by their male spouses. It keeps the perpetrators outside its premises, promising to keep the women and staff safe. As one refuge 2 senior social worker emphasised, the woman comes to the refuge to hide and to be safe. This seems to be the biggest advantage of concealment.

Hence both publicity and secrecy have advantages and disadvantages and neither can be portrayed as the preferred option.

6.6 Running the refuges

In refuge 1, responsibilities are shared among the residents and volunteer workers. Routinely, the division of daily work is discussed among the residents. Their practices are non hierarchical, rejecting the power structures commonly evident in patriarchal institutions. Refuge 1 provides an environment that is unstructured, with minimal rules and procedures imposed by the refuge. In this way the women enjoy sharing their responsibilities, and these are not seen as chores. If a duty roster exists, it is drawn-up by means of house meetings, and the duty is always voluntary.

House meetings are held once a month, but there were ad hoc discussions when need arose, over a cup of tea, to voice dissatisfaction of any kind or to ease disagreements. Mak Pah engaged in the meeting and helped solve the disputes with a motherly approach. She was popular for her patience, exercising her 'unconditional love' and always seeing the moral of the story. Her altruistic and warm approach went down well with the women and the children in refuge 1 as these respondents explained;

I am glad I chose to run to this refuge. In the first instance my uncertainty about many matters; the staying in this home, my personal problem was resolved by Mak Pah's approaches. Staying here becomes so pleasant and I think others also feel the same (Alis).

I always felt insane by the unbearable happening in my life. I was depressed. When I first came to this refuge, I was unfriendly and quarrelsome, I was aware. Mak Pah talked to me and patiently spend a great amount of time, almost everyday. She was concerned about my sleep. When I refused to eat, she encouraged me and has meal with me, though I also refused to help in the refuge that time. Slowly, I found myself becoming friendly and feeling comfortable. Now I helped in keeping the house clean, I helped with the cooking. I learnt how to bake cakes and do some handicraft and work well with others. During my last birthday, Mak Pah even present me this necklace. Mak Pah said because I am good, responsible and committed (Cathy).

Refuge 2 literature also describes the conscious effort made in practicing egalitarianism in the refuge.

“We tried our level best not to have a hierarchy in decision making and adopted an inclusive process, by seeking everyone’s opinion and input, be they volunteer, staff or resident” (Ivy, 2002, pp.10).

Monthly “house group” meetings amongst staff and volunteers are held to discuss the progress and process of case management. They also have “house meetings” where the residents plan activities, and at the same time air grievances within the refuge. Residents are consulted when formulating rules and guidelines (Ivy, 2002). House meetings among residents and staff are held bi-monthly.

While refuge 2’s management sees a work roster as a practice to maintain justice and equality amongst residents, some residents experienced this as contradictory to their hopes of escaping from their controlling husband/partner. Thus work was seen by some refuge 2’s residents as daily chores. Betty expressed this,

Our duty roster was done by the night supervisor...//... I am not happy with the duty roster, because I feel that they control our lives here. Anywhere, I never openly make any complaint about the roster. I don’t want them to think that we come here full of complaint. So I prefer to keep quiet and appear ok. After all I won’t stay here long. Things that I could tolerate, I would (Betty).

There seems to be level of dictation to the women. The social worker at refuge 2 said, *“.....there is a duty roster for the women. We have a night supervisor and she would do the duty roster. The nature of responsibilities will be on rotational basis. We told the women that they have to do some work while in the refuge. They can’t just sit down doing nothing. Some women prefer to do cooking only; others prefer cleaning or washing (SW¹² Sheeta).*

¹² SW referred to social workers at the refuges.

Social worker Nina explained,

Normally the contentious issues are always about their duty. So in order to be fair, and maintain justice and equality to the women, we do the roster for them. This was done by the night supervisor. The night supervisor ensures that the responsibilities are rotational (SW Nina).

While the women carry out their responsibilities, the elements of 'power and control' were felt in the refuge. This felt like having to live again in a hierarchical system, like revisiting familiar experiences at their home where they were indoctrinated by their husband/ partner. While this might be perceived as a minor problem, it could be an irritating factor, and might affect their process of developing esteem, confidence and sense of empowerment.

6.7 Participant observation in the refuges

I had the opportunity to observe all the activities while collecting my data in Malaysia in December 2005. Throughout my week in the refuge 1, I received a warm welcome and I was invited to join any activities in the lounge, in the kitchen, on the patio and in the garden. They were happy when I joined them in the kitchen and took their pictures. The relaxed atmosphere enabled me to establish fast rapport with the residents and the social worker, hence allowing me to feel comfortable faster than I could have expected. My relationship with the children was also easy to develop. I was welcomed to their various performances of singing and dancing, a pattern of friendliness and entertainment for their visitors, which was repeated each day I was there.

Mak Pah described with passion the system adopted by refuge 1 as 'A to Z care', a holistic approach, similar to how a family should harmoniously function, in a home full of cooperation and a safe haven. Refuge 1 was committed to organization along democratic and non-hierarchical principles; working collectively, politically, economically and socially to change the conditions of the women's and children's lives. There was no 'warden' or other clear authority figure and there was no management committee.

The residents were encouraged to assist the volunteer social worker, and were respected and valued for the authenticity of experience they had to share. The five social workers were all volunteers who helped the residents ensure the smooth running of the refuge. They also helped to generate income and funds for the refuge. This was done through the sales of cakes and cookies displayed in the grocery shop at the refuge patio. The residents also volunteered to make handicrafts for sale. Some skilled residents helped the others to develop their skills in sewing. Interested residents were also invited and encouraged to learn about hairdressing at one of the ex resident's hair salon.

There were two voluntary male drivers, one a refuge 1 neighbour and the other an orphan son of an ex -resident. Some men and women volunteers help to liaise with other agencies including the police, courts, hospitals and social workers at the client's request.

The power of refuge 1 was shaped by a newly created family system that replaced the 'patriarchal family' as the legitimate protector of the women. Many of the residents expressed gratitude for this experience of family, sisterhood and unity with the housemates, and for no longer feeling isolated.

I could feel the family hood in this refuge. We have sisters living together; elder sister, younger sister, some are so caring and motherly. So I never felt lonely. We integrated well with each other. My children are also here with me, so the children also could socialize with other children (Alis).

When I first came into this refuge, I feared the unknown place and people. But shortly I adapted well and people are all very kind. There was a lot of give and take and everybody help each other in anything from routine house work to personal matters. Now that I had been here for a month and a half, I felt comfortable and happy (Eve).

I felt happy staying here (refuge). We cook and eat together, we worked together, we shop together. We were not restricted to go shopping or a day out, except Mak Pah encourage us to go in a group for security purpose (Cathy).

During my time at refuge 2, good relationships with the staff were easy to develop, as they were warm, welcoming and professional. I tried to socialize with the residents and managed to establish a quick rapport with a few, but some were rather reserved. My presence generated many stares when I first arrived. Some residents remained distant from me, but I soon found ways to communicate with them and two became very friendly. I had the opportunity to socialize with them in the lounge and realized that there were some language barriers with residents from the Philippines and Kampuchea. However, when the women volunteered to be interviewed, I felt honoured that they would trust me enough to share the painful moments of their lives with me, and that they felt that I did care and sympathise with their experiences. I am aware that an individual approach works with these women, as they disclose their stories without much probing, and their stories are definitely enriching.

Like refuge 1, refuge 2 holds to the principle of self-help and self-determination, encouraging its residents to take an active part in the day-to-day running of the refuge. All facilities are shared and families are expected to live in an atmosphere of cooperation. Refuge 1 believes that all residents can take responsibility for what happens in the house. Women are encouraged to share their experiences, so as to give each other support (Ivy, 2002).

6.8 Services for women, programmes and activities

When the women first arrive at the refuges, each woman is welcomed and allowed a calming down session, and registration. She will then be guided around to the house, introduced to other social workers and other residents, the rooms, bathrooms, kitchen, sitting room. Both refuges provide a variety of services apart from refuge accommodation. In most instances the social workers would help the women to report to the police and enhance legal support, enabling access to health care and access to

schools for their children. Once the women have settled in, the staff will discuss the options open to them. Individual counseling and moral support are ongoing activities.

Normally when the women came to this refuge, we let them calm down and felt settled first. Once settled, did registration. We asked them general questions and showed them the rooms and the surrounding. On the second day, we would like to be more intensive. We dig into their problem and then asked what are their plan and expectation and how we could be of help. Then we see to the needs of the social works. When they needed to lodge the police report or sought medical treatment for example, we assisted them with these first, especially for women who came here as emergency. Once settled, we will see the needs to do counseling (SW Nina).

Most women arrived here as an emergency, so we calm them down first and show them around the house. We also assist them for police report, seek health attention where appropriate. Later we do individual counseling approach that seems to be more effective than group approach (SW Julia).

In refuge 2, the woman is given a key or named worker. However in refuge 1 they practice a mentor-mentee system, where the mentee chooses who their mentor will be. This facilitates a relationship that is genuine and compatible and enhances a feeling of sisterhood between the survivors and the volunteer social workers.

The residents in both refuges are responsible for meal planning, cooking, washing, laundry, house cleaning, decorating and child care. Self help and self reliance are the general rule. Both refuges provide programmes geared towards developing the women's self esteem and confidence. The women were very much engaged in activities that were held outside their organization such as attending talks and seminars to increase their knowledge, to socialize and for emotional healing, emphasizing their moral values, in line with their religious beliefs and advocacy.

Both refuges develop in-house programmes and activities with the help of volunteers. These include a range of physical activities namely yoga and self defence. Support programmes are scheduled twice a week and organized by refuge 2. These include English as a second language and building skills such as learning to use computers, writing resumes and curricula vitae. Beside those there are other activities initiated by the residents. Depending on their knowledge and skills these activities include teaching and learning table manners, flower arrangement and various handicrafts.

During my field visits the women also had the opportunity to take part in role play activities organized by a student who did an internship at refuge 2. I had an opportunity to watch the plays, including a scenario in which one woman was asked to play the perpetrator and another victim, and vice versa. Later the scene was revised to show desirable behaviour in victims and perpetrators. This kind of behavioral approach in a simulated scene aims to allow the woman to revisit their experiences, promotes consciousness of women's rights, and helps them to learn to overcome the fear and violence in an effective manner. Some residents felt overwhelmed by this role play while some could enjoy it and find the play meaningful in creating and developing self awareness. As expressed by Safa:

I truly found this role play interesting and meaningful. When I first did the play I was the victim of domestic violence, I was overwhelmed, as the pain was real to the extent I was really tearing and Mary [the internship student] allowed me to cry out loud. Funny, it feels like a kind of relief when I cried in front of people who understand what triggered me to cry. In another scenario I played perpetrator and I felt in power and control. Hmm...that's how my husband felt I think because the woman who played victims allowed me to shout and beat her. The anger management part of the play was equally real (Safa).

The women looked forward to programmes and activities as they felt less lonely and more in touch with the life outside the refuges.

6.9 Follow up support

In both refuges, services rendered were extended into the community when the residents left. This was especially important for some women who continued to need counseling and further advice, which is mostly done by phone. There are some, however, who preferred face to face meetings with the social workers. The refuges continue to help the women who have to earn and have to leave their little children at the child care centre. The refuges continue to accommodate their children for a maximum of two years and would advise the women to visit their children frequently, at least once a week.

Some women will seek help for their children's schooling (funds or scholarship) and career guidance. The women may also ask help with establishing a new home as they need used mattresses, beds and other furniture. The contact appears to be dealt with mostly by the ex- residents since the social workers are overstretched.

We never turn them down. We somehow tried and managed to get them (the women) something, some helps needed. When they called and needed counselling, we continued to counsel and most of them preferred to do counseling by phone. Our duty is not only to see them in the refuge, but also to see that they are able to sustain outside. Sometime the help was extended to their children. For example one recent significant case, we managed to get a place for one of our ex client children into YWCA vocational course and another of her children a scholarship to further her undergraduate study. The woman was so thankful. She was a single parent of no fix income. To send her children for further study must be a daunting endeavour (SW Sheeta).

When the women returned and asked for help, we continued to help the women even when they have left the refuge. We have some children of our ex resident remaining in our child care center. We continued to accommodate their children at a maximum of two years and we would advice the women to visit their children at least weekly. We will also take care of the children school, when needed. There were also cases where the women started to leave independently and asked for

basic facilities for their unfurnished home. We usually asked the public to donate things like bed and so forth (SW Nina).

End of year gatherings are events that ex residents became excited about. Refuge 2 staff see this as a means of catching up with their ex residents.

This year we are planning for the end of year gathering on the 17 December. We have received plenty of calls from our ex residents to enquire and confirm their presence. Besides having fun, we will have opportunities to catch up with them. Often it is interesting to hear some of them have independently progress. They shared their stories to each other and it is inspiring to hear.

6.10 Barriers to progress

Both refuges reported similar obstacles affecting the implementation and progress of their plans. Broadly, these may be classified as history and culture, resources, funding, skills of workers, excessive bureaucracy and infrastructure.

6.10.1 History and culture

As discussed earlier in this thesis (chapter 2), the majority of women continue to live intimately with their “abusive husband”, because the family is a fundamental unit in Malaysian society. The family unit normally comprises a father, a mother and children. Anything less will be perceived as incomplete family and the women will always be blamed for the break up of the family. Going to a refuge will be seen as confirmation of this.

The moment the abused woman is seen leaving her home; she will be label as woman with problem by her society. Many women thus choose to stay in the abusive relationships and endure the consequences. To the public eyes, as long as the woman remains married, she is a ‘good’ wife (Munah, professional).

Some people argued that the refuge seems to enhance the breaking up of a family. So the refuge is seen as a place for a trying period for separation an

(escape from the commitments and responsibilities of a wife) *from the husband and that is not acceptable in our society To me the refuge provides a safe and secure place where the women run to* (Sara, professional).

Some abused women prefer to hide in a more private place because of the social stigma attached to abused women.

Perhaps the refuges are not popular in our society because of the prejudice that the refuge enhances the breaking up of a family. Also the women have families and other relatives or friends to hide. Hiding in a 'more private' place appears as a measure of preference to some women. When the place of choice is less public, the women can continue not to let the public knew of their violent relationship. They can't bear the social stigma once their family breakdown is making known to the public (Munir, professional).

Women in certain elite groups, who have better economic status, would prefer not to stay in a public space because of the perceived social stigma of family breakdown. The family would rather take the women from her husband and accommodate her elsewhere.

Some abused women who disclosed their experiences of being abused to their family members will get support from their family. This is quite common amongst the elite who have excellent economic background, commonly the rich entrepreneurs' family. The family will take the women from their home and accommodate them at their family second house. The support will also be in the form of money. In this way the women could be socially and economically independent. Also the woman could escape the social stigma of being abused by her husband (Esah, professional).

To some women, the availability of family, relatives and friends can be an option. However, how accommodative are others in the household? How willing are they to provide the support practically and emotionally? How long are they willing to give the support? Depending on what values and norms are held about women, marriage,

the family and violence, by this 'informal' supportive network, it seems equally possible that it may be seen as a source of aid in their moving on to a new life or as being productive of further distress. If the women's efforts and strategies do not synchronize with their 'informal' network, then the women will face further crisis. It seems that in these cases, the women and the children are at the mercy of those who accommodate them. This has consequences for women in the refuge as there is a lack of consistency in provision and support.

6.10.2 Resources: unavailability or scarcity of committed workers

I asked other participants (professionals/social workers/activist) about their opinion of social workers and the operation of refuge. The following were their responses:

It sounds ideal to have social workers who were qualified and who could sustained the demand of social works in the women center or the refuge. There may be one or two of qualified staff in a refuge, but they get exhausted after couple of years. So they resigned from their works at the refuge as other organization offered them better remunerations with less works demand. I have a few friends who did this (Munah, profesional).

To run a home, there need to be some committed volunteer workers as the home usually have lack of fund to pay full time social workers. Most people work to earn a living. Very few people are willing to take the burden as volunteer social workers (Ika, profesional).

Even a women center is not as active as would like to, let alone the refuge. There is no volunteer social worker and staffs are often exhausted by the nature and demand of this kind of social works. There seems to be no 'ending', yet everyday we have 'many cases of the beginning' (Irene, profesional).

There are always over stretching of physical and mental energy in social works, and this is particularly so in the nature of works at the refuge. When the workers and the

The ideology of meeting the criteria of selecting and recruiting ‘ideal social workers’, who can sustain the demand of the work in establishing a refuge, seems to be a problem commonly described by the participants in this study. The participants pointed out that some organizations may have selected and recruited qualified social workers of quality. When these workers were attracted by better remuneration, with less demanding work in other organizations, they left. It was also mentioned that not many social workers were passionate about their work, many people work to earn a living, rather than working as volunteers. Others argued that the nature of social work demands long physical and mental commitments; some workers were unable to sustain the pace of the work and left. This has consequences for women in the refuge as there is a lack of consistency in provision and support.

6.10.3 Resources: lack of funding

Both refuges are autonomous and independent organizations relying very much on the public for funding. However there was no consistency in donations from the public, making it difficult to have a consistent budget as one social worker pointed out,

Public fund can be episodic. There were time when we received very minimum and at times really a lot. Donation pours in especially when people were in a celebration mood like during Ramadan¹³ and Eid¹⁴. In this way we needed to be very careful in tabulating our budget so that we have enough funds for the year ahead (Mak Pah, refuge 1).

Government welfare aid was inadequate to run the refuges and also to undertake the community work. As one social worker pointed out,

¹³ Fasting is a practised by Muslims in the month of Ramadan, where believers who are healthy and fit refrain from food, drink, and sex from dawn to dusk. Fasting teaches the Muslims to appreciate their needs being met and at the same time emphasizes the need for alms giving to the poor and the unfortunate.

¹⁴ Eids are days after Ramadan where the Muslims celebrate the end of the fasting month.

The government aid was small. They gave us a small grant. Our expenditure was like RM 600, 000. The government give us RM 21,000, ha..ha..not even 10% of the expenditure. The grant was not based on our expenditure or on staff salary or things like that. It is like RM5.00 budget per resident (SW Sheeta, refuge 2).

Similarly another social worker stated,

We certainly got some amount of fund from the Social welfare department. They calculation was like RM3.00 per head. You will then get around RM3000 per year, yet our expenditure rise up to RM5000. Staff salaries, water, electricity, phone bills, meals for the residence, all this need to be budgeted. So we do a lot of fund raising, also working together with other private organization, to name some Canon, Bodyshop etc.//..we did get individual donation, but it was not consistent. Sometime we anonymously received money in cheque of RM1000, RM2000 (SW Nina, refuge 2).

Women often run away from home empty handed because of the ‘desperate situation’. They leave everything they needed behind and later find out the importance of bringing things when they are away from home. The social workers reported that the bedding and bedclothes, clothes and toiletries were often from public donation. There was a particular demand for new underwear from the voluntary donors. SW Sheeta stated,

If they came with nothing, which they commonly did, we gave them underwear, toiletries and cloth. We asked people to donate new underwear.//.. lots of people call, and people knew us through friends of friends of friends, so we will inform them what we were short of like underwear, toiletries, pillows and mattresses. So we told donors what to donate. I used to tell donors that our mattresses were getting worn out and we needed mattresses. The next day, we received 20 mattresses and 20 pillows from an anonymous. People are generous lot (SW Sheeta, refuge 2).

The professionals, the social workers, and activists also expressed concern about funding for the refuges, as described in the following excerpts:

To establish and maintain a refuge and to get funding is always difficult and laborious works. Often we heard that even the existing sources of funding can be disappearing or under threat with time. So you might have heard that there were refuges that were not even establish before they have to be closed (Laura, professional).

When income (funding) are much less than the spending, obviously the refuge will be doom to failure. The refuge just can't survive. You may get some secured small fund from the government, and various insecure sources from other bodies or individual and this income will only promised a very short 'life span', and the refuge will die its natural way (Ika, professional).

The bulk of money received from the grant might be just enough to cover the staff salaries, other budget will need to rely on other various sources that are not secured and will disappear before the refuge is even establish. We heard a lot of this sentiment in running a refuge (Munir, professional).

It is often difficult to maintain the refuge, let alone to expand and to improve the conditions in the refuge. There might be initial sources, big in size, perhaps not secured sources and shortly would begun to dry up. The workers may be able to work out this fund with serious thought and commitment, but it could be physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting on the workers perspective. Some passionate workers don't mind their endeavours though, but you will see most of them withdraw (Rasid, professional).

Refugees in Malaysia do not get funding as they do in the UK from housing benefit and supporting people funding for individual residence. A similar situation is evident where women access refuge in the UK and have no recourse to public fund.

6.10.4 Excessive bureaucracy

Workers at both refuges admitted that paperwork can be overwhelming. There were inadequate staff to ensure that documents were well prepared and delivered in time. The social workers use their energy in dealing with practical work and by the end of each day, many would feel emotionally and physically exhausted. As a result paper work will be put off. One social worker said,

Paper work, all of us...I think I am the biggest culprit. I didn't record. We didn't write in our file. Counseling, whether face to face or through telephone may take 20 to 30 minutes, the least. Then another phone calls and counseling and bla...bla..bla and the day end. Where are times for documentation? The next day we tried to recall, we will bound to slip so many information or when another day get busy and another day and another day, by the time we wanted to document we forgot and lose the essence of the case (SW Sheeta, refuge 1).

When the question was posed about whether staff numbers were inadequate, SW Sheeta replied,

We can't expand more than this. Within our fund we have to work within the number of staff available right. Even we didn't have enough space for this number of social worker. Because of the nature of work yunno like, handling women in crisis could be so time consuming and exhausting. Yesterday you were here and you saw I was the only social worker around. Other social workers were out working in the field. By the time they came back they were tired. Understandably, they were not only physically exhausted, but also mentally and emotionally (SW Sheeta, refuge 2).

In refuge 1, Mak Pah believes in utilizing time doing something practical rather than spending time on documentation and paperwork. As she says,

Paper work...I couldn't afford the time. It's so time consuming, yet we couldn't really see the product. We have one volunteer social worker who is doing paper

work for this refuge, but we all believe that we would rather spend time in something practical, some active activities (Mak Pah, refuge 1).

6.10.5 Lack of physical infrastructure

The social workers recognized that there was inadequate space to cater for individual needs, and were concerned that the lack of privacy could be intolerable. A social worker explained,

We have four bedrooms and the bedrooms are on a flat-form. The bedrooms are shared. We provide them with beddings and cupboard and we gave them minimum, as they are not going to stay here forever. But sometimes I wondered how uncomfortable it is to share rooms with strangers, and no privacy. When there were fewer residents, than they have the liberty to choose a room for themselves and priority would be given to women with small children (SW Jess, refuge 2).

One of the residents also voiced the need for privacy.

I was not used to have so many people sharing a bedroom and a wardrobe. When we got dress and people were in the room, it was so uncomfortable (Safa).

However some of the residents had anticipated that a refuge is a place that is cluttered, and reported that the physical standard of accommodation was not their immediate concern. The overwhelming emotion was one of relief to have escaped from a violent home and moved to somewhere safe and secure. As one resident expressed it,

I don't bother about the crowded home as what is important is a safe place to escape from my violent husband. I have anticipated sharing not only a room with other women, but also the shower room, toilet, lounge. We shouldn't expect a place of luxury for free (Betty).

This place is a temporary temporarily. It gave us the time and space to find alternatives and find ways what to do next. Of course it is ideal to have a room for myself and my child, and privacy, but that's ok. We shouldn't be asking for too much (Gina).

In assessing the physical structure of both refuges, access for the disabled was not discussed by any of the social workers and the residents. It seems that the refuge only accommodates people who are able-bodied. It was clear from my field trip that there was no ramped entry for wheelchair users, which placed an additional limitation on the infrastructure.

Table of summary: Refuge 1 and Refuge 2

	Refuge 1	Refuge 2
How refuges started	Personal experience	Incidences need: women's plight
Philosophical approaches and objectives	Focus on 'self' [a woman]. Family oriented approach	Holistic view, combating prejudice and injustice and strives as a feminist organisation From individual self help approach to mass approach
Funding	Very small regular fund from government welfare aid, Income generated by residents: sales, fundraising, Public donations: foundations, banks, women's associations, corporations, individuals	Very small regular fund from government welfare aid, Public donations: foundations, banks, women's associations, corporations, individuals Overseas aids agencies
Residence nationality	Malaysian (90%) Indonesian (minority)	Malaysian (80%) Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, India, Iraq, Cambodia, Australia (20%)
Ethnicity	Malay (majority) Chinese and Indian	Indians (55%) Malay (31%) Foreigners (14%)
Age	Mostly 20 -30 Some 40's Participants in this study: 21 - 49	20's : 42% 30's: 33% Participants in this study: 20 - 45
Marital relationship	Mostly married Some separated/divorce	Married (legal): 50% Married (customary rites): 7% Divorce/ separated: 12% Single: 27%

Length of relationships	1 – 20 years	1-10 years: 63% 15 – 17 years: 37%
Length of stay in the refuges	6 months – couple of years (some become voluntary workers after leaving refuge)	Less than a week – 3 months: 83.6% More than 3 months: 16.4%
No. of stays	Mostly stay only once Some returns 2 nd – 4 th time	Mostly once: 82% Some return 2 nd -4 th time: 18%
Model of the refuges	Open door policy Open shelter and published address	Open door policy Address confidential
House governance	Non hierarchical Non political Unstructured environment: minimal rules and procedures imposed by the refuge	Duty roster (done by night supervisor)
Practices of the refuges	Family oriented system	Self help/ self determination Encourage to give each other support
Services for the women, program and activities	Mentor – mentee system Help police report Help medical treatment Counseling support Moral support Organising outing :to attend talks/ Seminars Physical activities: Play and games, yoga. Other activities learn from peers: flower arrangement, handicraft, baking cakes and biscuits	Key or named worker Help police report Help medical treatment Counseling support Moral support Organising outing :to attend talks/ Seminars Play and games Physical activities: yoga, self defense Skill building: learning to use computer, writing resume, English as second language Other activities learn from peers: table manners, flower arrangement, handicraft Play/ drama : adhoc
Follow up	As requested by the ex residents: counseling, advice and helps in establishing new housing Social visit: Eids [days to celebrate muslim fasting month]	As requested by the ex residents: counseling, advice and helps in establishing new housing, child care(max. 2 years), Advice children study and career development Alumni: end of year gathering
Barriers	Resources and fund Paperwork Infrastructure	Resources and fund Paperwork Infrastructure

6.11 Conclusion

Both refuges have similar aims, protecting women from sources of danger, refreshing them and helping them to learn to be independent. In both refuges, help was also extended in obtaining services like legal aid, health and community resources and medical help in the best interests of the women. The supportive, safe environment enhances the women's development in making decisions about their future. However the refuges also presented distinct differences in the way they were set up and in methods of work. The philosophical underpinning of refuge 2 promises a more robust approach in combating violence against women as compared with refuge 1. They work on advocacy with the public at large, while refuge 1 is more confined to the women within the refuge.

The significance of the family aura created in refuge 1 appears to be basic to the emotional, economic and community survival of its residents, while also enhancing harmonious living conditions. While refuge 2 similarly advocates sisterhood, the elements of power and control perceived by some of its residents in the way the duty roster is made, forces them to revisit the experience of living in their home and being dominated by the perpetrators of violence.

This chapter has shown the two refuges in perspective. In the next chapter, I present the women's evaluations of their lives before, during and after being abused, and their experiences and opinions while staying at the refuges.

Chapter 7 Women's history of domestic abuse and arriving at the refuge

7.1 Introduction

This chapter first presents the demography of this study. Subsequently it describes the women's evaluation of their lives before, during and after being abused. Close examination of the women's stories reveals various interrelated and interdependent themes. This is crucial in understanding how the women perceived themselves. After years of violence, what made them finally leave the violent partner and enter the refuge? What were their expectations of people around them, particularly the social workers? In the later section of this chapter I examine the women's perspectives of their initial contacts at the refuge. As there is substantial evidence of post traumatic stress (PTS) amongst abused women, this chapter concludes with a discussion of these issues.

7.2 Demography

The women in the study were aged 17 to 49 years, most in their 30s. Most women in the study had been married for between one to ten years. Most women had one to three children; a few had four to six children and one woman had eight. Two women had no children. Most of the women had secondary school education, one having a certificate in business studies and one a diploma in education. Their spouses/ ex-spouses were also mostly secondary school educated, one having a degree in business administration, two with diploma studies, while one woman refused to talk about her ex husband's education and occupation.

All of the 26 women in this study were married; eight were divorced by the time of the interview. However, one of the women who volunteered to participate was not a case of abuse, but was seeking shelter and help because her husband had died and she had no one to turn to. The remaining 25 women make up the narrative of this study. The women who volunteered to participate were from various backgrounds. Apart from the Malaysians, the women were migrants from Singapore, Vietnam,

Kampuchea and Indonesia. With their different backgrounds and multi-ethnic origins, the women held various cultural and religious beliefs.

Also included in this chapter are comments from interviews with the professionals, activist and social workers outside the refuges who participated in this study.

7.3 History of the women

Many women reported that they had experienced domestic violence within the early years of their marriage. The average length of time women had suffered domestic violence was ten years, and ranged from two to eighteen years.

The following discussion presents the findings of the interviews with the women in the two study refuges in Malaysia in the hope of understanding abused women's "lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990). It focuses on the "subjective meanings attributed to these events" (Denzin, 1989). Close examination of the women's stories revealed interrelated and interdependent themes. Each theme describes part of the women's feeling, thinking and behaviour: each experience is always that of an inextricable part-whole relationship as found in Gestalt theory..

7.4 Arriving at the refuge

The women generally said that they opted to go to the refuge because they were desperate for help. Some had no family or friends to turn to, while others refused to involve their family with their marriage dispute. A few women reported that they did not want to put their family through any more distress. Both refuges are primarily concerned with the women's needs and offer services to any woman who comes to the refuge. Most of the women had been seriously physically, emotionally and mentally abused. Many women came to the refuge without resources at the time they entered the refuge. They left home in panic, desperate for help and assistance.

7.4.1 Home as a battlefield

The home was experienced by the women as a battlefield. The women struggled to survive under the power and control of their domineering husbands. A conflict of

beliefs about normal relationships, daily routines and the experience of being continually abused created a crisis of meaning. What is the purpose of my life? The meaning of these women's lives was disturbed and distorted. They could not comprehend what was happening to them. The women felt the pressure to hold the family together as the intensity in the home increased. Their sense of trust was violated by a 'husband' who is supposed to be their closest friend and ally in life. Their vision of contributing security and love to others as mothers and wives was shattered.

7.4.1.1 "Hal rumahtangga" (home as a private sphere)

"*Hal rumahtangga*" (home as private sphere) was a phrase commonly used by the women. *Hal rumahtangga*, in the Malaysian context, refers to the privacy and sanctity of the home and marital relationships. The women believe that being abused by their male partners is a private family matter that should be kept within the home. This is demonstrated by the women in this study:

I believed that family matters are home affairs that shouldn't be known by anyone outside our home, not even our parents, siblings, neighbours or friends, nor the police. When my husband beat me, this is "hal rumahtangga". It is shameful to let others know that my husband has ill treated me (Julia).

My culture teaches me that whatever happened at homes are private affairs only to be shared between husband and wife. People won't want to be involved as they believe that getting themselves engage in a family dispute might break the family further (Gina).

Lily and Kamaliah described similar thinking:

Why do I have to tell people about my "hal rumahtangga"? We are not supposed to talk about our private family matters to others. People will point finger at us, as a woman who fails to maintain and nurture our family relationships. These are women's responsibilities in our society (Lily).

Telling others would bring shame to us. Furthermore, it is “hal rumahtangga”. We need to keep our family problems in total privacy, between husband and wife. That was what I believed all this while. Should the abuse be known, we women will always be seen at fault for being unable to keep the home in harmony (Kamaliah).

Not only the abused women considered the concept of *hal rumahtangga* but also other participants (professionals) in this study, as described in the following excerpts:

Whatever is happening at home is considered private, a total privacy. The family members are not allowed to disclose anything unpleasant in the home. In a way the practice can be considered as hypocritical (Sara, professional).

I agree to the concepts of home as privacy when everything is comfortable and pleasant, but not when the woman has to suffer the male domination at home. The woman believes privacy includes tolerating and enduring the abusive relationship in silence. The women will tolerate the pain for years. There are of course, a few women who finally disclosed as a result of unbearable pain (Munir, professional).

A home may be considered as private, it is acceptable. I am aware that many women do keep their home as private as they could until they suffers so much violence, and for so many years. I would strongly disapprove to silence domestic violence as private (Irene, professional).

I am quite confident to say that Malaysians encourage silence about family issues, because my observations are embedded in several pieces of fieldwork I have done in Malaysia and since I have already lived here for couple of decades (Laura, professional).

Another participant, Esah argued that the women’s silences on the issues of violence that are happening at home are mainly due to social stigma. Her 30 years of

experience working in the State Social Welfare Department in Malaysia justifies her argument.

I think women preferred to keep their violent relationship private because of the social stigma that is attached to domestic violence. The women were seen as inadequate and unskilled wife should their experience of domestic violence be discussed in public (Esah, professional).

These accounts revealed that the partner's abusive behaviour was a taboo and should be kept silent, not to be discussed at home and to be concealed from outside society. Its invisibility was directly related to the women's feelings of guilt, shame and fear of social stigmatization. By letting others know, they risked being judged as being at fault, because in Malaysia, women are expected to be responsible for developing, maintaining and nurturing relationships. For many women, these feelings were strong enough to prevent them from seeking help, even from their relatives. As a result, they were isolated from their family, friends and society as revealed by Suli and Ramlah in the following two excerpts:

It was ok in the first six months, he would allow me to meet my family and friends, but he would send and fetch me and he called me every half an hour. Later in our marriage, he said he saw no point of me spending my time with family and friends, and he was also angry when my family and friends came to our home. I realized I was socially isolated (Suli).

Ramlah's experience was no better:

I was a full time housewife. I was not allowed to leave home even for shopping without his (husband) company. Day and night I must be at home. He would check for any incoming telephone call, and I must get his permission to call out. He would check our itemized bill, so I couldn't lie. After many years of marriage, I felt I lost all outside (outside home) contacts, and I lost my friends.....it was like torn apart from any other relationship outside our home (Ramlah).

From the above women's experiences, it is evident that human relationships are torn apart as the women are dragged into losing their social contacts. They feel disconnected from the community.

7.4.1.2 Chronic wounding

The women described their experience of being abused as chronic wounding. They would feel wounded in the moment of abuse, and the psychological pain remained for days/ weeks before they suffered more violence. Being wounded describes a state of extreme terror, helplessness, powerlessness, fear and physical pain that makes excessive demands on the women's ability to endure the abusive events. The feelings of pain are so profound that they stay in the women's bodies, in their mind and in their spirit. This is depicted in Cathy's description of her husband's constant abuse. Cathy described her pain at being continually wounded:

He (husband) punch me all over, slapped, used anything in his hand.....belt, helmet (short pause).... burnt my arm with his lighted cigarettes...look at my arm (showed scarred arms) and over my head (showed scar on the head). There is never any part of my body that he hasn't damaged. The pain was unbearable when I was beaten and I continue to feel it for days and week. Before I could recover he will turn violent again. So the pain, and fear continued [sob and pause during the interview] (Cathy).

Reb described similar experience:

I was about 12 weeks of my first precious pregnancy when he (husband) kicked my abdomen. For the next couple of days I experienced strong abdominal pain and later I realized that my pregnancy was terminated (miscarriage). I was depressed for months but did not stop him from being abusive. He continued to be violent, throwing plates and chairs in which some would land on me and I would suffer the extreme pain.....like continuously feeling the pain (Reb).

On the same subject Pasra said:

Since he started to be abusive to me, I felt myself living in constant pain and fear. I felt the pain on all parts of my body. He would get angry anytime, for no specific

reason, and his anger was so unpredictable. So I was always in a state of fear (Pasra).

7.4.1.3 Enduring and avoiding

Early in their marriages the women tried to endure their husbands' abuse by various coping strategies. For example Mita claimed that,

I absolutely felt better at the refuge. I used to feel in turmoil and depressed at our home. I always felt nervous when my husband was at home because he can just become violent anytime, especially when he came home early before 12 midnight. So I would sleep early, and he wouldn't disturb my sleep because he was aware that I needed to wake up early to start my daily routine (Mita).

Kamaliah reacted by quickly getting out of the house when her husband's anger escalated. Amina preferred to spend time in undertaking voluntary work and any community activities. Suli, Ramlah and Cathy similarly explained that feelings of fear and helplessness caused them to remain stoic.

I thought at that time that I just needed to endure his anger and abuse. 'Sabar.....sabar' (be strong to endure this nightmare and just need to increase their endurance level). I could not hit him; he would become worse (Suli).

He was so strong. I couldn't hit and yell back at him. I just didn't have the strength to hit him back. So he would beat me until he was satisfied. When I remained passive, he would stop hitting after a short while (Ramlah).

Once I noticed he was not in the mood and started yelling and throwing things, I would run into the toilet, or into the room and keep the door closed. I was so scared. At the same time I was feeling so sad (Cathy).

The women endured and attempted to avoid the abuse while their husbands dominated them. Their belief in the sanctity of marriage resulted in them working at a high personal cost and against many odds to hold on to the marriage. But as the violence continued, the abuse became an unbearable burden. Feelings of fear, anger,

sadness and guilt penetrated their beings very deeply. Experiencing the emotional paradox of desiring to stay in a relationship, but being ‘eroded’ by doing so, they became physically and mentally exhausted.

7.4.2 Eroding the core of being

Prolonged abuse of this nature resulted in the women experiencing an erosion of what I called “the core of being”. While the women continued to do their best for their husbands and families, they were treated with contempt by their abusive husbands.

7.4.2.1 Erosion of identity

Their feelings of self-respect and self-worth were progressively undermined. Kamaliah described her feelings,

I felt useless.....so frustrated and really humiliated. I lost my pride. He attacked my esteem. I felt worthless. I never get any acknowledgement from him. Its only fault.....faults by me. There was never anything that I did that satisfied him (Ramlah).

The repeated episodes of humiliation and degradation meant that the women felt shattered and worthless. The abuse ‘eroded’ the inner core of their identity.

7.4.2.2 Erosion of physical and mental well-being

Physical and mental well-being coexist and are interdependent. Reb explained:

After I lost my first pregnancy, I had frequent headaches. I went to GP. They advised me to have enough rest and try to forget the trauma of miscarriage(Reb).

Do you think that my frequent headache was the effect of his slaps and the helmet he knocked on my head? [Showing me the scar at the right temporal region underneath her hair] (Cathy).

Suli believed that her gastric pain worsened each time her husband beat her.

Each time when my husband yelled and beat me, I would also start to have gastric pain. So I suffered from 2 types of pain, physical pain and gastric pain. I can feel the pain where I was beaten and also the gastric pain. I felt nauseated and sometimes I vomited. Then he will stop beating (Suli).

As the women were pushed to the edge of their endurance by an abusive partner, their stress-related symptoms progressed and became recognizable in physical terms. The tension built and dominated their day-to-day lives to the point that they were no longer able to cope. Yet seeking professional help did not necessarily improve their situation. There was always the risk that the stress-related symptoms would be interpreted by the husband as further proof of a woman's inadequacies.

7.4.2.3 Erosion of social well-being

In addition to direct physical, psychological and emotional abuse, women seemed also to bear the major burden of responsibilities in relation to the family's financial circumstances. The women in this study continued to feel responsible for maintaining the home. They worked in a variety of places to earn extra family income. For Julia :

I woke up as early as 4 in the morning to prepare breakfast for husband packed lunch for the children. Then I baked local cake for sale at the school canteen. By 0900 hours I worked as a cleaner at the general hospital and returned home at 1800 hours. Over the weekends, I earn by washing, drying and cleaning at people's houses (Julia).

In Malaysia household chores are the responsibility of women. Thus the women in this study regularly sacrificed their rest and sleeping hours. Yet their energy was increasingly expended in trying to avoid abusive episodes. Lily's husband insisted she gave him a thousand plus Ringgit Malaysia a month. She talked also of *paying all the bills.....//....buying all the children's clothes and buying books and stationeries.*

Whether they realized it or not, the long term consequences of being abused eroded the core of their being. It eroded their identity and their wellbeing physically and

mentally, emotionally and socially. Significantly, however, despite living in a society where violence against women is largely unspoken of the women reported the abuse and sought help. These findings in West Malaysia are very similar to the study findings in Sarawak, East Malaysia by Putit (2001), and Jamayah et.al. (2005).

7.5 Turning point and the decision to contact the refuge

Some women disclosed a feeling of what I called ‘partial eclipse’ of life. Others were experiencing a ‘total eclipse’ that felt altogether too frightening. Such a process of a ‘marriage eclipse’ is a result of constant discrimination and violence against women, and led to them deciding to leave.

‘Enough is enough’ exemplifies a critical point in beginning the process of deciding to leave the abusive partner. In deciding ‘enough is enough’ women have reached a point where they are willing and able to disclose their abuse.

I had been his wife for the miserable six years. He started to be abusive two months after we got married.....he shows his true colours, provoked by even petty issues, then the violent will come. I was exhausted. The experience was so painful, and harassing. I am ashamed. That very big fight we last have was so terrifying and unbearable, I dragged myself to this refuge. Enough is enough of his anger. He shouldn't question my action (Safa).

In the initial stage of our marriage, it was emotional abuse. After about one year, he began to slap me, later he kicked and hit me with his helmet and belt...//.... I used to be treated by GP several times for the wounds. GP will give me medicine for my pain, along with anti depressive and sleeping pills. This help doesn't solve my problem. Instead I felt that I was in darkness of life, cold and scary. I need to get out of this problem (Fatima).

I suffered so much. So many times I forgive him, and forget, and forgive and suffer and suffer.....but the more I suffer, the more he hit me. I don't know why. I had been beaten for 5 years. One day I can't bear anymore suffering, I

cried for help from my neighbour and that was the starting of my new life (Betty).

I felt like life was so cold and scary. I always hope he [husband] would change....married 20 years, but now I realized it was just a really....very stupid dream (Rosi).

The women began to understand that enduring and avoiding abuse was exhausting and worthless. They recognized the ineffectiveness of their previous coping strategies and knew it was impossible to continue life in this manner. Believing abuse to be “*hal rumah tangga*” led to further destruction of their “selves”. The women could no longer bear the sole burden of making a successful marriage. They needed to regain some measure of security and meaning in their lives. It had taken them decades to decide to disclose to the relevant authorities and to be released from this imprisonment.

To these women, leaving their violent partner is the most dangerous time. It is not a simple or safe thing to do. In fact some women stay in a violent relationship for many years because they think it is safer to stay rather than having to face the ‘hardship of being independent’. The women in this study presented the history of remaining in the violent relationship for an average length of ten years, long enough to exhaust them physically, mentally and emotionally. They have to flee.

They struggle courageously and reach a ‘turning point’. The women finally came to the refuge centre, where they volunteered to participate in this study. Some women went directly to the refuge centre, while some women were sent to the refuge centre at their own request after seeking help at the hospital or police station.

7.6 Initial contacts at the refuge

7.6.1 Feeling oppressed

Although the women have moved away from their violent husband, many have not yet managed to depart from feeling oppressed. Feeling like victims of abuse was

usual among the women in these studies. The only variation between individuals was the degree to which they felt oppressed. The women expressed the feeling of being oppressed in various symptomatic ways, as they internalized the victim's role.

7.6.2 Fear

During the initial contact at the refuge, the women were still haunted by the fear of being oppressed and were unable to lose the fear that had always been part of their lives since they were first abused. Analysis of the experience as the women enter into the refuge reveals the fear and uncertainty of the new environment. Regardless of whether the women came to the refuge for the first time or on a subsequent occasion, fear remains the prevalent emotion on arrival at the refuge. Some said they had felt emotionally and physically sick. There was also the immediate fear that their abuser would find out about their stay in the refuge and so there was the potential of further attack. There was also fear of isolation and uncertainty, as the women in this study described,

Reb explained:

My first month or so in this refuge I was still in fear, fear of people around me. So I kept to myself... a lot. I even skip meals so that I won't be around others (Reb).

I felt scared, because I felt that even my husband was already so bad to me and I don't trust him. Surely other people cannot be trusted as well. When I felt the sorrow of my misfortune, sometimes I cannot explain (Betty).

Marie feared her husband might be able to trace her and her daughter as she had tried, but failed, to escape from him on various occasions. She feared the repeated cycle of violence, being resumed:

I fear my husband would be able to trace us. I went to the refuge to escape from my husband's violence. He kept disturbing us [the woman and her

daughter]. *Called us back, then beaten us, then we ran away, then he traced us and called us back and things repeated* (Marie).

Some women expressed fear of the unknown as they knew little of the refuge and its governance.

I ran away from home (another district in Malaysia). I slept at the PD bus station that night and was ganged raped by a group of 'bad' men. I struggled in madness and ran to the nearest hospital nearby. I informed the doctor of every damn happenings of my life. After treatment, I was brought to this refuge by the doctor [with Cathy's consent]. When I first came to this refuge, I fear how I would be treated as I am so used to be ill treated by people around me (Cathy).

I didn't know where to escape from my hot tempered husband. I have no family or siblings around Malaysia. My neighbour introduced me to a Chinese lady who knows about this refuge, that I don't know anything about. I do feel it might not be a better place but I have no choice (Betty).

Similarly, the women in Abrahams (2007) study also reported that they were shocked by the fact that they had come to a refuge and uncertain as to whether they would be able to trust the other residents or, indeed, the workers. These strong feelings served as powerful reminders that violence has far-reaching effects, and thus immediate practical and emotional support is imperative. To the women the feeling was intense. To the social workers, it required concentrated work. Abrahams (2007) study reported that the period after arrival was one of intense and concentrated work, with both practical and emotional tasks to be dealt with by the social workers. It can be difficult for workers to balance the needs of new arrivals against those of existing residents, especially when there are a number of admissions together at one period.

7.6.3 Worries

The women were worried about their lives and what would happen next. Some women had been used to being shunned by their husband and shut off from society,

family and friends. They were used to being economically dependant on their husband, and thinking of living independently can be a daunting task for them. They were also concerned for their children.

I am worried about myself, where would I be and how I would survive. I am not working and not educated. I am also worried about my children's future (Ramlah).

I am worried also about my baby (5 years old daughter). The first two days I came here, they (other resident's children) scold my baby. I told them they can scold me, not my baby. She is so small and young. She was so scared. When we go into our room each night, she would nag me to go back and question me why we are here (Betty).

7.6.4 Uncertainties

Many women did not know what to expect when they first came to the refuge. They were feeling uncertain of what to do, and what was expected of them. Some were concerned about the attitude of the social workers, while some others were concerned about the attitude of their fellow residents, especially the senior residents, who have been there a while.

After find shelter, I felt left hanging, uncertain what happened next. I felt, I am here now.....nowhere to go and don't know a clue about tomorrow (Gina).

You won't just withdraw from responsibilities and be in misery throughout your stay in the refuge. You also won't just eat and sleep. But when you are in deep trouble of life, you just don't know what to do. I also didn't know what to ask and what to say with the staff. Most of my early days in the refuge, I just sat alone in the room, or in the garden (Kamaliah).

Some people who have stayed here longer.....make me uncertain, they were bossing...//...may be they were protected by the staff so they felt safe bullying. (Betty).

In this stressful time, having to adapt to the new environment and people, the anxiety levels can be heightened. Many women were still confused about what happened to their life and to their family, and were in desperate need of help. Some women were confused about their role in the refuge.

For me, I asked myself what I am doing here. It's quite annoying at time when you thought you want to sleep and yet you feel guilty sleeping when others are still awake (Kamaliah).

I kept asking myself, should I stay, should I return home. I am confused by my action of running away from home. Its never easy trying to accommodate and adapt yourself with new environment especially you have to share everything with others who you don't know. When I kept thinking about my problems, my sleep turned into a nightmare (Mita).

7.6.5 Depression

The women still felt the pain and the shame and since it was hard to bear, this could lead to depression. They came to the refuge very mindful of their 'social stigma' as women being abused by their husbands. When the women first entered the refuge, many believed that the social worker "just wouldn't understand" the experiences of being abused as they are just there to earn their living. So some women kept mute and feelings of depression continued.

I couldn't have coped. I thought there was no point of disclosing my family problems as they just wouldn't understand. Mmmm... afterall I thought the workers are there to earn their living. So I kept quiet about myself and remained depressed for the first few weeks in the refuge (Rosi).

I would rather keep quiet. I came to the refuge to escape from the pain, not to share with people about my husband's violence. It's ashamed. It was a very depressive experience when you tried to keep the pain inside of you (Suli).

7.6.6 Vulnerability

Some women emphasized how vulnerable they felt when they first entered refuge. The women were already fragile in their own home. Their exposure to the refuge can be another struggle to be faced. Contacts with people who are strangers made them more vulnerable. It made it all the more difficult to cope with intimidating or even just 'strange' behavior.

People, who were staying here, in the same boat with me, could make me felt worst. At one time, I just told them off. I came here to look for some comfort, for empathy, and some hope.....we all are victims of violence from our husbands....with so many problems. I got so many problems with my husband already. I can't afford anymore energy and time to think of other things, and accommodate problems that other people in this refuge created (Betty).

When I first entered this refuge, the women who have stay longer thought I was having mental problem. When we lived in a violent relationship for so many years, for decades we became depressed. We learned to cry a lot, we learned to quarrel as well (Cathy).

7.6.7 Immobilisation and paralysis

Oppression affected the women's thinking and their capacity for autonomous activity was retarded and immobilized. The women's needs had never been a priority in the home, and were never taken seriously. They were used to living under the control and power of their husbands with all decisions of everyday living being made by the husband. The women were paralyzed by deeply entrenched cultural norms of being submissive at home.

My mind was so terribly disturbed by problem of “rumahtangga”. I am still paralyzed (mentally). I was unable to think straight anymore. I was not allowed to act on anything without his consent (Kamaliah).

I felt that I couldn't think anymore. I was never allowed to think. Everything I did must be from his command. If I didn't listen to him, he would say that I was disobedience to him....my husband..... and that is unacceptable in his family orientation and culture. That's how I have survived in the past many years (Ramlah).

7.6.8 Redefining the Self

The women had suffered violence for years. Redefining the self when one has low self-esteem and loss of confidence can be a daunting task for the women. Yet when they left the abusive relationship they anticipated becoming themselves again. The women needed to disengage feelings of being oppressed and recover from the abusive relationships.

I had lost my esteem. I had lost my confidence. I needed to recollect myself again. I need to redefine who I am, what am I capable of, what is my potential (Safa).

This was the not the first time I ran to the refuge. I will not return home again when I leave refuge this time. When I returned home previously, I thought I wanted to give him the chance.....no point, he never changes. I know what to expect from this refuge and I know once I regain my confidence again, I should be able to be economically and socially independent (Ruby).

7.6.9 Redefining Direction

Many women reported that they had lost direction in life. The women thought of the refuge as a place for support and security, and a place that would help them regain their confidence in life. The overwhelming emotion was one of relief to be somewhere safe, where others could help to redefine the women's direction. There was a constant hope that their situation would improve in the future.

You feel..... when you were feeling oppressed, you were confused and in fear, you like having people around you. You need to feel safe and secure, and you need somebody to lean (Ramlah).

During those many years when I was in abusive relationship, I lost direction in my life. I not only get support and security in this refuge, but also relearn to be confident again. Slowly, I began to realize that my future is in my hand (Safa).

In the refuge, I felt safe, confidentiality was great. You were living with people who shared same experience and we learned from each other of new direction in life (Marie).

7.6.10 Redefining Life

Once freed from the violent environment, and starting life afresh, the women could hope to regain their self-respect and esteem. They could hope to rebuild their lives, and to plan for their future and that of their children. They hoped to create a new meaning in life and to live in the world in a more fulfilling way.

I entered the refuge because I wanted to change life. I heard of this refuge from friends and from advertisement in pamphlets (Pamela).

I heard about refuge 2 from advertisement through papers and radio. When I was in the refuge2, my son was just 7 years old. I was young, uneducated and unskilled. The staff in refuge2 was so helpful to me and I learnt a lot....really learnt a lot and being alive again (Pasra).

People that help me (mother, social worker at the refuge, and a close friend) play very important role in my life. They helped me financially, morally, and lots of "mirroring". They taught me.... and knowing them was like putting puzzle together. Yes, I see that our live are full of puzzle, and if we failed to

put the puzzle together, we would feel unsettled, full of worries and sadness in our life (Rubi).

The women mostly arrived at the refuge in a state of anxiety, confused, and desperate. They needed not only safe accommodation, but also understanding and empathy from people around them. They needed information and genuine support in reorganizing their lives. Some women needed considerable amounts of help, not only with solicitors and medical attention, but also in recollecting and rebuilding 'self'. Many women in this study were young, with no job skills and little education. Some needed considerable amounts of help with matters like police reports, children's care or their schooling, and solicitors; assistance with their claim for social security, applications for legal proceedings such as divorce and children's custody.

Its "nervewracking" having to handle legal matters without helped from people around (Safa).

We also assisted the women with application for aids at "Baitulmal" (Islamic welfare department in Malaysia) and assisted them for police report by bringing them to police station (Mak Pah).

Some women came to this refuge still with bruises and in pain, but could do nothing about the problem they faced. They are panicked. Let say they needed to lodge the police report or medical treatment; we needed to assist the women. We would discuss with them first because we wouldn't want to make decision for them. We wanted to make sure that... that was their decision (SW Nina).

Some women were prepared to leave their marriage, but they were confused and in a desperate state. They would also asked helped and assistance for divorce proceeding and child custody. We assisted and help them with the process and also transport (SW Jess).

You know, if they wanted to go and make report to the police or other legal matters, we would accompany and assisted them. Sometimes they didn't know what to say and write in the report. So if they went on their own, it may take the women 2 hours.....3 hours just to make report. If we went with them, it may just take less than an hour...//...if they transfer school for their children, we would also help them...//...in case they needed to stay somewhere and they couldn't look after their children, we would offer them child care at our center. So we offer them all the services (SW Sheeta).

Some women seemed to settle in the refuge fairly quickly, while some required longer periods of time and effort to feel at ease with others and the environment. Perhaps a slow process of recovery is what would be expected from the women. There may be no ideological programme that could foster the women's empowerment and independence. However, the women needed to be given special attention in order to build confidence in the light of their low self esteem, alienation, and sense of failure.

7.7 Practical and emotional support (in crisis)

The women may be emotionally exhausted and frustrated from repeated efforts to get appropriate help. The trauma from a violent relationship has shattered the women's confidence and esteem and so they need to find the strength to rebuild life again. The necessity for a structured physical and emotional support process that assures the women progress must be the central concern of the social workers. The woman is likely to manifest an inability to function at her usual level of responsibility.

In this study, the women, during the crisis stage, have lost their self esteem and confidence. They require a nurturing relationship with the workers, as the social worker Nina describes,

During the crisis stage... especially, the women appeared so delicate, like... they needed care, almost similar to the children nurtured by loving parent. One possible manifestation during the crisis period is the women lost of

esteem and confident, and thus the inability to function at her usual degree of responsibility (SW Nina).

The women's predominant need at this stage is to be taken care of. The workers provide emotional support through being available for them to talk with, to listen to them with empathy and a non judgmental attitude. Such relationships offer the experience of being listened to and understood, and impart the sense that the social workers are available for help through empathy, information and discussion. The warm and empathetic approaches from the social workers that serve as emotional support to the women help them to build trust in others again.

7.7.1 Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) as opposed to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The women's testimonies as presented above indicated that there was quite a substantial evidence of post traumatic stress (PTS) among a significant number of women experiencing domestic violence. PTS symptoms include fear, anxiety, and depression, fragility and vulnerability, headache and disturbed sleep. It is therefore important to examine the difference between "post traumatic stress 'and' post traumatic stress disorder". In brief, when a woman suffers PTS she needs helps and support, while women with PTSD need more intensive medical intervention.

In the absence of available published literature on these issues in Malaysia I report here on personal dialogues with Dr. Fariza¹⁵, a psychiatrist with vast clinical experienced in treating patients with mental illness in Malaysia. Dr. Fariza personally remained reluctant to treat abused women under a DSM diagnosis i.e. for PTSD. It is common for women to come to a psychiatric clinic presenting problems of anxiety, depression, and suicidal attempts. When the woman does not disclose being abused by her male partner, and the medical practitioner does not rule out the root cause of the symptoms, it will lead to the treatment of symptoms only i.e. prescriptions of anti-anxiolytic, anti-depressive and tranquilliser drugs. Dr. Fariza further asserted that a

¹⁵ Dr. Fariza is a psychiatrist from Malaysia. At time of my study, Dr. Fariza is a PhD student in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bristol, UK.

thorough assessment should be carried out when the women present symptoms such as insomnia, gastric pain, headache, feeling helpless and hopeless. The women may need a more intensive intervention along with the specific medication.

I argue that it seems more appropriate to describe the women experiencing domestic violence as having a complex trauma reaction i.e. PTS rather than PTSD, as there are dangers inherent in diagnostic labeling. For example the woman may come to be seen as ‘an object’ rather than a person who having a normal reaction to severe trauma. Once medically diagnosed, medications become central treatment interventions. It is important to remind the community that the abused women are not sick but living in a sick situation. The attached social stigma of being given a label of a mental disorder stipulated in the DSM diagnosis adds further trauma and damage to self esteem. As such it limits scope for social support, crisis management and intervention. Various supports that include social, physical and mental health, esteem and confidence, housing, finance and follow up with therapy, counselling and treatment, should be intrinsic to the women’s situation. In addition, as Abrahams (2004) points out a blanket diagnosis of PTSD to a women experiencing abuse might “potentially disadvantage her in court actions for child contact or residence orders” (pp.6). Also see page 52 – 59 for previous debate.

7.8 Conclusion

The findings and discussion in this chapter highlight the history of being abused and how the women have suffered as a result of their partner’s violence. Their stories show how they have struggled in their home, ironically a ‘battlefield’. They challenge the tendency to treat domestic violence as ‘hal rumah tangga’ (home as private sphere), that is rampant in this study context. The ‘core of their being was eroded’ as they were ‘chronically wounded’, but they have survived. They also brought to us the nature of their experiences during their initial contacts at the refuge, including their feelings, thought and behaviour. I argue that the women were experiencing post traumatic stress rather than post traumatic stress disorder, and required support and guidance, rather than medicalisation.

To analyse these issues further, the study now looks into the women’s lives while they were in the refuges.

Chapter 8 Life at the refuges

8.1 Introduction

There are two sections in this chapter. The first section presents the women's lives at the refuge. Analysis of the women's stories and descriptions while staying in the refuge revealed further interrelated and interdependent themes. These are presented as: feeling safe, counselling, mutual support, learning to 'stand on own two feet', transformation, importance of role models, learning to control their own emotions and those of others, assuming responsibilities and achieving autonomy, 'we-them' authority structures and empowering process and re-learning to be social beings again.

The second section discusses support systems while the women are in the refuge. Their program and activities are described and observed; their voices, along with that of the social workers are examined. The discussion that follows includes 'practical and emotional support, counseling, group work and mutual support, therapy services'.

8.2 Feeling safe

Feeling safe seemed to be the most important requirement for the women to restart life. They claimed that they felt safe when they entered the refuge. To reduce risk, and to enhance security and support, the women in both refuges were encouraged to be in a group if they left the refuge. Visitors were strictly prohibited, unless an appointment with the social workers had been arranged earlier. Should anyone, especially men, insist on entering the refuge, the workers will call the police on patrol who are always there to help. The women revealed that feeling safe and secure was essential to transformation.

One advantage in this refuge was feeling safe and secure. The place is highly fence and the gate is always closed. No visitor is allowed to enter, unless appointment are made earlier with the social workers. I do feel safe here. Feeling safe makes me able to think and plan what to do next (Gina).

Our safety and confidentiality was well look after at the refuge. It was reassuring to see that our neighbours care about our safety and kept vigilance. Seeing police patrolling quite frequently around this area is significantly reassuring (Amina).

Throughout my stay at the refuge, the place was safe. It was well protected. There was never any incidence of intruders into the premises. I believed the level of safety and confidentiality was high (Reb).

We need to feel safe. Then we can think of our problem and see how we can solve our problems. This place was safe. They were very confidential about the address as well. Even the police cannot enter this place anyhow. That was why I said this place is safe. Whoever comes, men especially, they are not allowed to come to this place, even when they brought policemen with them. They are protocols to follow to enter this place (Safa).

Mita and Cathy expressed the security they felt when they go out in a group. We go outing, but the social workers encouraged us to always be in group. I believed it was primarily the safety issues (Mita).

We are allowed to go out and shop in a group. Mak Pah advised us to go in a group for security and support. So we also feel quite safe when we go out (Cathy).

Refuge 2 kept the address secret as a security measure for the women, also to provide protection for the refuge workers. Despite the secrecy, there are some occasions where men do appear outside the gate, trying to enter and get their wives. If the social workers see the need for increased security they will quickly call the police.

We kept this place confidential to the public for security purpose, both the women residents and our staff workers. Even if the husband found out his wife is here...if he comes to the gate, we used various defences to keep the women

safe. We denied to the husband and said that she is not in this refuge. Otherwise, if he insisted, we will call the police, and as always, the police on patrol will come as soon as possible, chase them away, then they will come again, and then we call the patrol police again. We need to be firm with these men. Also we must always be alert to unwanted visitors (Jesse).

I think this refuge have high security level. I even saw they [social worker] refused to open the gate from people who they don't know. Then that man was not happy, and shook the gate. The social worker immediately called the police, and shortly after, the police came and ease the scene (Ruby).

For refuge 1, publishing its location signifies an open system. They believe that it is important to have a strong relationship with their neighbours and law enforcement. The frequent police patrols round the area help to keep the refuge secure. The feeling within the community that they have ownership of the refuge adds further confidence to refuge 1's support and protection. Their neighbours volunteer to be alert to intruders and are always willing to help when the need arises. The published location seems to invites community support and protection not only of the refuge residents, but also the staff. The fences are very high, and the gate very strong to add to their safety measures.

Refuge1 is concern about the women safety, for sure. You may have noticed that the fences are made considerably high with strong gate. Look at that... [Pointing to the fence and gate]. The police cars are always patrolling this area. Our neighbours sense of community ownership are also very reassuring and impressive. They practically keep vigilance to the refuge (SW Jah).

It is extremely important to have a strong relationship with our community and the law enforcement. You can really count on them for the women's protection and safety. They are always vigilance, and always willing to come when call for. They will appear within minutes when you need their hands. So far they haven't any successful intruder, though there was once, an isolated

case, where one of our woman husband managed to beat the wife when she was outside the gate and I ran to the scene. I too was beaten. It was my impulsive response, it was a mistake. I should have immediately called the police and our neighbours. Anyway our neighbours quickly rushed in to help and police came shortly (Mak Pah).

Yes, I do feel safe in this home. The police are always seen patrolling around and our neighbours are also on the watch-out. So far there has never been any breaking in incidents since I stay here (Sarima).

Since I came to this refuge, I feel safe here. My husband never came here. Unlike when I ran away from him and stayed at my mother house even when I left just a day, he will chase after me (Kamaliah).

When asked about safety at the refuge, Hasnah had initial doubts about her safety. She responded:

When I first came into this refuge, I can't be sure of its safety. We may feel safe from outside threat but how safe can you feel when you are staying day and night with all the strangers, from different background and character. Can they really be trusted? Also, the house is open to the public, but surprisingly it is a safe place. Earlier I was scared of the openness, but as I continue to stay here, I feel that there was nothing to be scared of as there was always people around the house and the police are always around too. But after staying here for the last 8 months, I can say this shelter has been a safe place (Hasnah).

8.3 Learning to 'stand on their own two feet'

The women began to realize that being too dependent on their abusive husband can be suffering and allowed the abuse to continue. They learned that they were too permissive in allowing their husband to take over the practicalities of their life. The women begin to believe that they are on the path towards standing on their own two

feet. They are aware that this is a lengthy process of trial and error but worth the effort. The women learn to assume responsibilities and accountability for themselves.

We are responsible about our own life. We are so use to be practically control by our husband, and we end up suffering. Learning to stand on our own two feet is like a child learning to walk and falling and we get up, walk and fall again and again, ha...ha...[laugh]. Lengthy processes, but each day, like a child learn to walk, I felt surer of my ability to handle my life (Reb).

A lot of "learning to stand on own two feet" was extremely uncomfortable. But everybody need learn to stand on their own two feet. I felt that by talking with the social worker, I learn about myself [strength and weakness], and I learn to improve my life, learn to be independent and not depend so much on others. When we depend so much on our husband, we become dependent, and we suffer because we allow him to control us (Marie).

In the refuge I began to do things on my own. We have to learn what to do with our self each day, not just what we should do as instructed. It was not at all comfortable at first. I think I have learned to organize my life and my thinking from mixing with people in the refuge (Mula).

Once I left the house, that means I will not return.....because that was wh,y as much as possible, I tried to prolonged our marriage [tolerate and endure the abused] and tried to make things better, to try to save our marriage, but it look like impossible and not worthy. I can't take it anymore. I think once I make up my mind, I don't want to go back. I don't want to look back. That's it. On the other hand I have to learn to stand on my own feet. It may be a long, uncomfortable and even very difficult process. But that's ok, because I have paper qualifications and at this refuge we are encouraged to be independent and self sufficient. So I have to re learn how not to depend on people, on him again (Safa).

.....because at home the women are used to being directed and never allowed to make any decisions, and so the women have learn not to make any decision, so at least...yeah we cannot deny that some women will return to their husband, and the husband who will never change, but when the women return home, they will return as women who know their rights, as women who have the courage to make the situations better at home, meaning the women would know how to handle the violence before it escalate and getting worst (SW Nina).

Women always think about other people, they never think about themselves, yunno...and we recognized that and we say you are number one, others are number two, number three. So you have to take care of yourself. You have to empower yourself. You have to be self sufficient. You have to stand on your own two feet. There are lots of ways to do it. They are lots of people who you could ask for help and assistance. You must know the resources and how to do and get going...//...Yunno, somebody has to bluntly tell the women...tell them to get to their senses and that's part and parcel of the social workers work, I supposed. (SW Sheeta).

8.4 Transformation

The social workers were optimistic about developing the women's self esteem and confidence. They established more comprehensive programmes involving a wide range of educational and psychotherapeutic activities. The use of psychotherapeutic approaches differed in its nature between the two refuges. While refuge 2 used modern techniques and approaches, refuge 1 used the spiritual approaches. In both refuges, the social workers recognized that the women need constant courage, motivation and positive interaction to release the potential for transformation.

We tried to offer anything we could to the women. We see and counsel them everyday especially when they first come to this refuge. We also get help from voluntary social workers. For this six month an internship student is helping

us with skill building to emotional healing as part of our group activity for the women (SW Sheeta).

There are people from outside, coming to the refuge to give classes, according to their expertise and professionalism, for example, English class, computer class ecetera (Reb).

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to observe the various activities managed by volunteer social workers and those who were doing internship at the refuge. The women described their experiences:

We were also taught how to write curriculum vitae...resume, at the same time we will have some kind of exercise on how to face an interview or work. So we were asked to act like in dramas where we act like... we enter an office...of a company and others [social worker and other residents] observed and later give feedback about how we interact with the interviewers (Safa).

They (social workers) gave us great support. The various programmes and activities had been very valuable. We also played drama on how to handle our emotion and anger management. In this way we not only learn to handle our hot tempered husband at home but also when we face the outside world (Fatima).

We play drama and that was fantastic. It helps to bring things out. We see things that happened to us like in the movie. The experience of being abused was like recorded and tape, and that are kept inside us. When we play it out, we will see and feel it clearly as we do it again in action. It does help to trigger us to reflect and think, because we make it real again by the play, yet not in a scary and real threatening environment. So we are able to feel our action through the action as plan and feel what is next [drama]. That feeling was so real, so real (Reb).

We learnt how to apply for a job, write letters and resume. We also learnt about interviews and be impressive during the interviews. These include the way we dressed, the way we communicate and interact (Mita).

In refuge 1, the emphasis for the process of transformation was on the spiritual and higher self. The challenge to stay on the path of higher self was not only in the face of fears, but as a form of routine in life. The women said that it was a revelation to read, understand and believe the Quran. They felt calmer as they transformed from their state of ignorance to one of compassion. The women also looked forward to the fasting month where they are invited to perform in the “Nasyid¹⁶”.

Almost 100% of our residents were Muslim. So it is easier to offer them some religious teaching. This includes the Quran reading and understanding of the text, and “Nasyid”, by the volunteer religious teacher. Each year usually during the fasting month, the women and the children will be invited to perform “Nasyid” at any religious occasion. I believe that this kind of activities give strength and motivation, developed confidence and esteem to the women and the children. What is significant is the programmes provide calmness and peace to our being. By changing the internal, the external will be change and it has worked perfectly well for me and for most of the women in this home who has faith in God (Mak Pah, founder refuge 1).

We learn to read Quran. It was revealing. The religious teacher came and taught us, both the women and the children every Saturday and Sunday. We also learned “Nasyid” (religious choir) and performed choir at some religious function when we get invited. This will happen every year during the fasting month, before the Eid (Emily).

Changes are really taking place in within us as we read and understand the Quran. I never read Quran before. It was not that I don't believe in God, but I was just ignorant of how much help I could get by asking from God (Hasnah).

¹⁶ Nasyid is a kind of Muslim religious choir.

Although it didn't look like anything happening, but there was. You could feel the calmness after each prayer and after each time you read the Quran. It is not just about reading, but finding meaning to the text was revealing (Sarima).

Amina strongly believed in the importance of an internal locus of control to change woman's lives with external factors considered as being secondary. As Amina described:

I believe that transformation begins from self-internalization, almost 99% from inside of us, only 1% from outside. For us to transform, to change and improve it all begin from inside of us. We must hold on to the principle that life has to go on. We cannot expect others to change us, we have to reflect, think and plan the way we want our live to be. Of course the changes have to be gradual as women like us are so used to be dominated and abused. So we need advice, motivation, support and guidance from the social workers. The support from other women at the refuge was equally great (Amina).

Once the women underwent transformation from being dominated and abused to becoming more confident, there are potential contradictions for women between religion and women leaving the family. As discussed earlier in 2.6.4, according to the law of marriage, divorce is absolutely the last resort. However women's safety and rights need to be addressed. In the refuge they read the Quran as a revelation, but in the society some part of the Quran are misinterpreted as the women being disobedient should they exercise their rights.

8.5 Importance of role models

Other women's experiences and successes become sources of inspiration and motivation to some women. For example, Mak Pak's own experiences, her ability to cope and develop strategies not only to survive but to help other women, become a model to the women who stayed at refuge 1.

Listening to Mak Pah's own experience and her courage to survive gave me the strength and courage to live. I volunteer to help out in this refuge. It gave me lots of satisfaction to see other women smile again (Alis).

Knowing Mak Pah's background, listening to her personal experiences was emotionally touching. She described the hurdles she faced. The stories of her earlier struggles to survive were such courage to me. It is a great inspiration and motivation to see her able to help other women of similar problems. Getting this refuge establish from scratch is remarkable and admirable (Emily).

Mak Pah's own story is indeed worth acknowledging. Her personal experiences became an inspiration for her to establish a refuge. The part time voluntary social workers who are mostly ex residents of refuge 1 also shared their stories and their own experiences and how they moved on with their lives. Their approaches and strategies become a strong motivation for women to unlearn helplessness and to learn 'living afresh' again. These voluntary social workers become the model for the women to 'keep going'.

Rubi, an ex-resident of refuge 1, has her own hair dressing business (small scale) and welcomes the current residents to work with her. Rubi serves as another model and inspiration to the women. She believes that other women too could be economically independent if they plan and put effort into organizing their lives, and she encourages them to do so.

The women need to develop their will power, plan and organized their life. I believe they too can be independent (Ruby).

Pamela, an ex resident of refuge 2 started work as a car washer at a garage. After a few years of working and planning, Pamela established her own car wash center, currently having about ten cars to wash each day.

I sometimes follow up at the refuge, catch up with the social workers and joined their Christmas party. I took the opportunity to advertise my car wash center and at the same time motivate other women to be independent (Pamela).

Some women felt that staying at the refuge is a 'relearning process'. Women who once had self esteem and were confident, economically and socially independent had lost all those values and became full time housewives. The situation was worsened by the abusive relationship at home. Safa described:

At home, I felt so down. I always think about...I think I can't do this, I think I can't do that. I think that I can't manage to do all these things...I think I am not a good person. Before married I was working. People said I was aggressive [firm] quite independent, in fact very independent yunno, active and always have lots of activities. But once I married. I am not active anymore. I was a full time housewife, at home all the time. So when I want to do something he [Safa husband] always said, 'you think you can do that?' He always looked down on me. So that's how my confident level deteriorated. I even don't have the confident to write letters and fill forms anymore. I feel stupid...feel stupid. ...//...I realized that I regain my confident after a month or two staying in this refuge. I feel like what I have just told you.....I feel like I have regained my esteem and confident....//... I heard other women success even after similar experiences like I did, husband belittled them, husband slapped, kicked, choked, burnt them. These women later become successful because they learnt to handle their situation and they changed (Safa).

In Safa's narrative, she realized that she had given away all her power and surrendered as a 'responsible-obedient' wife, yet he belittled her. She recognized later that the situation created pain, helplessness and paralysis. Her presence in the refuge signified her readiness to change.

8.6 Learning to control their own emotions and those of others

The women in both refuges felt their personal inadequacies in controlling their emotions and their fear as survivors of violence. The women have learnt that the more they suppressed their frustration, the more severe was their undercurrent of dread that came with knowing they are going into a depression. They had so much fear when they first left their homes and went to the refuge. The women began to recognize that they needed to learn to achieve greater control of their emotion and fear. They became aware that it is fine to share their experiences and it is fine to cry.

When the women are in abusive relationship they are always in constant fear. The women are also unable to control their emotion. You will see them easily cry most of the time, when first arrived. So after a while, staying with other women in this refuge, they learn how to overcome those fear and emotion. They see that there are ways to ventilate their feeling rather than surrender and cried (SW Nina).

It is very upsetting when you are unable to control your own emotion and fear. I learn to calm my emotion while I stay in this refuge. It was through counseling; it was through being alone and meditating. I prayed a lot here (Safa).

When we are abused, our emotion is so disturb, we can't think well, like feeling insane. I learned in the refuge that it is ok to listen to other women stories, how they have been abused and it was equally painful like my experiences. Then we will cries together, that's ok. Because after crying we feel better (Cathy).

I felt I am more in control and calm now. The social workers and friends seem to know when your feelings are so down. I also learnt that it is not a shame and it ok to cry (Eve).

Mita voices the need for “control of emotion” in a responsible manner in relation to the house meeting.

In the meeting, it is time to thrash and be listened to, about what we like and what we don't in the refuge. However, we learnt to control the situation when the meeting gets heated, and argument escalated (Mita).

Some of the women in both refuges recognized that they had also learned to negotiate living with others in a responsible manner. The women were encouraged to express feelings, rather than keeping them inside.

If the women don't like something, they will tell us. I don't like the way she talk to me. They even learn to express things like...I don't like you order me...around...or things like that (SW Hasnah).

For the women who felt threaten to talk, we have suggestion box. Then we discussed about the problems or issues in the house meeting (SW Sheeta).

I don't think we can control others. That's not my style. But I think we can negotiate. We have to learn to give and take (Safa).

8.7 Assuming responsibilities and achieving autonomy

In both refuges, the women expressed the view that, when they are trusted to carry certain responsibilities and to be accountable, it allows them to assume power in a responsible manner. Daily activities in the refuge can give a different feeling of accomplishment than 'daily chores' done at home. In the home it was considered 'chores' as the women carry out the duties for the family. The women felt fortunate if their husband and children appreciated their daily work. In both refuges when the women accomplished their daily routines and responsibilities, appreciation was expressed by the social workers and other women in the refuges. This feeling and appreciation can make a lot of difference for the women as they learn to assume power again.

It is so frustrating. He took for granted that all house chores are taken care. I have to work up at five in the morning making sure that all house chores are done. Then I got to earn and work at two different places. I reached home at six in the evening and responsible about the house chores again. Each day I will only managed to rest and sleep at twelve midnight. Yet my husband never appreciated my contributions to our family. He only saw my mistakes and got angry and beat me for the little mistakes I make. Everything that I do must be pleasing to him. I have no power to do things the way I wanted (Gina).

As a full time housewife, my work was never appreciated. When I asked him if I could work outside our home, he will flared in fiery (Ramlah).

I am a housewife. I will do anything I could at home to please my husband, yet there was never a sign of satisfaction from him. He only complaint about food not ready in time at his wish, children's toys not put in place and kept tidy when he was back from work, flower plant not watered. Yet he makes no attempt to assist in anything at home. When he makes fuss over nothing, I would rather keep quiet as he may escalate his anger if I ever react. I was always helpless and powerless and do things as he asked me to do (Suli).

In this refuge we take turn to look after the children and feel responsible about the children, health, and welfare. We ensure they are well fed, kept clean and healthy each day. When the children are sick, we will seek medical attention. Usually it's just minor ailments; fever, cough and cold and they get treatment fast (Reb).

In refuge 1, the women also felt a sense of accomplishment when engaged in other activities. Baking cakes, making handicraft for sale to generate income for the refuge, made the women feel appreciated. They felt the encouraging response from the public when they could sell their products. Handicraft and baking cakes also gave them the confidence that they can generate income if they have the will to do so.

Baking cakes and making handicraft are part of our daily activities in the refuge. The products are often sold fast. We feel good as we are able to generate income while in the refuge (Cathy).

We also do handicraft and help sell them. Though little, this can help lessen the refuge financial burden and we feel good being of help (Reb).

8.8 ‘We–them’ authority structures and the process of empowerment

When others listened to the women’s ideas they felt they became empowered. To the women, it is a new and meaningful experience that boosts their confidence and they felt valued when their views were listened to.

When others take our views for example during the meeting, during group activities, the beginning sense of empowerment are felt. It is so meaningful and a sense of achievement for me. Then I learn to be brave and speak out more (Pasra).

The social worker called it support programme. The support is not only base on their ideas, but the residents as well. We give ideas about what programme we should do, and on things that we need. The social workers will ask for our opinion and ideas to share with others. That gave us great feeling (Safa).

The women benefited hugely from ‘sharing’ what they knew, and ‘learning’ what others knew. Both refuges encouraged life skills development where the women learn from each other. For example some women have skills in table manners, flower arrangement, Yoga, cooking, baking, sewing and so forth. In this way, the women were given the opportunity to lead the session, be in charge, and teach others their skills and this helped build their confidence. The women felt the beginning sense of empowerment when they are themselves in-charge of the work, and decide without having to be instructed.

I did table manners in our support programme, whereby I am confident of sharing my knowledge and skills, telling and showing the women how to lay the table, how to sit properly, how to eat properly and how to communicate while you have your dinner. I think this have something to do with confident as well (Safa).

I am proud to have the opportunity to share my knowledge and skills in arranging flowers to my fellow residents. I teach them varieties of arranging flowers. Flower arrangement differs when on the table than when place on the floor, also depending on various site of the rooms (Hasnah).

I volunteer to lead Yoga's session in this refuge. I do Yoga everyday, but some women only join me occasionally. The programme help build my esteem and confident (Alis).

I volunteer to teach my fellow colleagues dress making. Some of them are amateur, but they have patience to learn if they are keen (Emily).

The women reported that the way the refuges ran was by sharing in decision making, though relatively less in refuge 2. This process was to enable greater in-house cooperation. Involvement in planning processes and decision making can be empowering to the women.

We consider house meeting as significant activities to the women. House meeting is scheduled bimonthly in this refuge. In house meeting the women discussed what is the problem, how problem could be settled and any matters that arise. The women also discuss about their food, the marketing and the menu, and the duty. If there are arguments, it is often about their division of duty. (SW Nina).

We have to see the women everyday, of course, talk with them, find out how they feel, what their plans are. Our goal is to empower the women. We won't

want the women to feel that we will solve their problems. We want the women to recognize the problems, talk and think about the problem and discuss ways to solve the problems. So we assist, but leave to them how best to handle the problems (SW Jesse).

House meeting are held once a week, but mostly now and then like ad-hoc when needs for meeting arise. This refuge is my home. So I see the women 24 hours for them to talk with. What the women need are good listening ears. So when they disclosed to me their problem, I will counsel the women and gave suggestions. They will need to decide themselves of how to solve the problems. In this way they learn about how to handle the problem and situation (Mak Pah).

Expressions of helpless rage, despair and confusion were transformed to a sense of shared responsibility through the building of the “we” that is seeing together, through creating an enlarged vision. The sense of the powerlessness of the individual is supplemented by the experience of relational power.

8.9 Re-learning how to be social beings

The women lost their social skills when their husband isolated them from the public sphere. After many years of social deprivation, many women fear even to leave home, fear facing the crowd without their husband’s company.

The refuges seemed to enable the women to live their lives again, to engage socially and publicly. They felt the beginning of a sense of enablement when they were able to decide to leave the refuge for a day out shopping, walking in the park, seeing movies and any outside activities with other residents. Just getting out of the refuge for a day out can feel like moving a giant inert rock. The women began to see the world as less threatening and a friendlier place.

I realized I was socially isolated, when I was with him [husband]. I remember after about six month I was married, he don’t allowed me to socialize at all,

no friends, no extended family, only him in my live. And he assumed I must be at home 24/7, so I loss all my social skills. When I stayed at the refuge, at first I also don't dare to leave the refuge, even out of the gate. At the most I will be in the garden. I heard about the fun the women have when they went outing for marketing, movies, shopping. Slowly I braved myself and follow them. Walking in the park with our fellow residents without figures of authority is an achievement. That makes me feel that the world is a friendly place (Suli).

I am a full time housewife. I was not allowed to leave home even for shopping without his [husband] company. Day and night I was at home...//...In the refuge I dare myself to go out with friends. Gradually I feel ok. I feel good being able to go out on our own for shopping now. Sometimes, its fun to spend weekend for movies, the fun I never did when I was married before (Ramlah).

Mita was hugely emotional when she elaborated her experiences.

When I was married before, I seem to know nothing and not able to do anything [voice change, crying and long pause] I was just 17. Silly...stupid yunno, so very stupid. I don't even dare to go to KL city, I don't know where and how to go to the bank. I don't know how to go to the clinic. I don't know how to go to the market. I depend very much on my husband, whenever I left home. I was not at all independent. I was like I was living in a cocoon. All my documents [birth certificate, identity card] were also in the hands of my husband. It is not that I don't know how to do things but I don't seem to know what is wrong and what is right, so I was scared to do anything especially outside the house. Ha..ha.. [laugh] I surely have change a lot now. I remember when I followed my friend [a friend during her stay at the refuge] the first time I learnt to go out when I was in the refuge, I hold her hand feeling so insecure, fearing the people, the crowd, plus not knowing where the places are. Oh...it was so scary, but I slowly overcame those fears by facing the fear and learn how others do (Mita).

The accounts from the women are far more complex than just being about physical and psychological effects. They need to learn to ‘stand on their own two feet’. They are learning to control their own emotions and those of others. They need to learn to assume responsibilities and achieve autonomy. They need to re-learn how to be social beings again. Above all the women need support systems.

8.10 Supporting women in the refuge

The following sections focus on the support systems while the women are in the refuge. The women need intensive individual support along with group support. This includes counselling, group and mutual support and various individual and collective therapies.

8.10.1 Practical and emotional support (in the refuge)

A small number of women explored their new freedom and tested their own boundaries while in the refuge. Abrahams (2004) coined the term as a period of ‘going wild’, as a way of postponing the need to deal with emerging feelings of pain and loss and testing boundaries.

The women in this study gradually learn to *stand on their own two feet* through the continuous practical and emotional support provided by the social workers and their peers. They learn about the challenges that are ahead of them and *assume control over their lives*. It is a long process before their plan after leaving the refuge emerges. Pamela expressed, “...it takes me in and out of the refuge to learn to live independently again”. For Pasra she was grateful for the help and assistance she received while in the refuge. She was in the planning stage of starting a small scale laundry at the time of the interview. She was helped by the social worker in relation to financial aids and also the contacts with people who were successful in business services. Social worker Sheeta helped to provide practical support to Pamela:

She [Pamela] stayed in the refuge for only five months, but she often follow up for counseling and advice and never failed to turned up for our end of year gathering. I knew her as a woman with courage and determination. She used

to plan and discussed about having her own car wash centre while she was in this shelter. That time she did car wash at two centers, and calculated that having her own car wash may be a big challenge to start but not really difficult to manage. We gave her all the support and encouragement, and introduced her to the welfare service for funding aids to start the ball rolling (SW Sheeta).

8.10.2 Counselling

The women needed support to reorganize their life. Sensitively adapted counselling approaches and skills are needed for dynamic interactions between the social workers and the women. The women begin to feel able to trust others again when their voices are listened to with sympathetic ears. The women reported the process of disclosing their experiences as having been extremely painful and shaming. Often the initial counselling was taken up with an outpouring of anger, as this was commonly the first time the women had disclosed their suffering. The workers' experiences of counseling were similar in both refuges.

Refuge 2 uses professionals to help with counselling while refuge 1 uses para-professional and peer counselling. Both produce positive effects by their unique approach.

We see and counsel the women everyday, especially when they are new here. Often the beginning contacts with the women were a lot of crying, otherwise outpouring of their anger and frustration. It is not uncommon that they claimed that this is the first time they ever disclosed their domestic abused. When they begin to trust you, that's when you show your interest and show them your empathy, they stories will slowly unfold. Some women have their preference of social workers. We will try to accommodate where possible (SW Nina).

Alis revealed that she can talk about anything that bothers her, as the counsellors are warm and approachable.

When the past memory revisited us, we can recall and feel the tension again. After each counselling session, I feel less excited and calm. With counseling, we disclosed things that bothered us a lot. We have the opportunity to expressed ourselves, especially to people who we can trust and who make us feel relieve (Alis).

This place gives me a lot of support...the counselling.....not only the shelter. I think counselling is the most important things because without counselling, we don't know where we stand. We can't really see our problems clearly. We remain confused. We remain so emotionally disturbed. It is such a pain (Ramlah).

Counselling sessions was always great. We are allowed to speak our heart out with good listener there. Expressing our feeling is good for our physiology ya. I knew it must be harmful to keep our problems inside, and that's why we feel depressed, sometime even feeling insane. We really got to get our problem off our chest, out of our system (Reb).

I felt the counselling session is always worthy. The social workers always gave their listening ear and that was very helpful in getting the worry, fear, anxiety, any sort of problems out of our chest (Pasra).

Counselling interventions varied according to the ways in which the women present their problems and the women's specific needs. Whalen (1996) has described the need for counselling interventions according to how the women define their problems and needs. These include the following;

- Directive interventions to assist women in getting their legal rights and material needs met
- Confrontative interventions aided the process of reeducating the women to a different understanding of women, women's roles, and women's relationships with men

- Supportive-empowering interventions helped a woman become more comfortable with herself and helped her develop more self-respect and a sense of personal power
- Therapeutic interventions were directed toward specific symptom alleviation
- Social action intervention was necessary when counsellors identified the women's social problems as social pathology and women's needs as sociopolitical change" (ibid, pp.81).

In this way, the counselling model of interventions not only helps to clear the "sickness" and energize the women in order to support their healing process, and empower them, but also incorporates sociopolitical change. The subversive counselling model suggested by Whalen (1996) incorporates social change activities for both the women and the counsellors. Together they should be engaging in an ongoing process of 'consciousness-raising' about women. The consciousness-raising practices connect personal experiences to collective understanding and to social, cultural and political action. Whalen (1996) emphasized that this is an important role for counsellors within the abused women's movement.

In this study, the type and details of counselling interventions were not explored. However, the women's accounts, as described above, indicate the effectiveness of their counselling session.

8.10.3 Group work and mutual support

The women's accounts in this study also illustrated the supportive individual relationship they experienced while staying in the refuge.

Staying with other women in this home has been so helpful and meaningful. We shared problems and supported each other (Eve).

It is so easy to express ourselves as people around are so willing to help and I felt comfortable helping others as well (Alis).

I never felt alone when I was at the refuge. I don't feel alone facing my marriage problems, experiencing being abused and people often shared their problems. We cried together and give support to each other. These get us going...//...As days gone by, I felt that we became big family. Family of different background, different race and believe and values, amazing don't you think? We grew together, in lots of ways (Reb).

Things I like most in the refuge is all the women similarly feel that we are in a big family. There is lot of love, and give and take system (Hasnah).

At the refuge, I learned social skills. The workers encouraged us to work together. Others do what they could, and so I learnt to do what I could. So you learned how to do things through socializing and group activities (Mita).

We felt like we are in a family here. We have younger sister, elder sister (Alis).

Things I like most in the refuge is all the women similarly feel that we are in a big family. There is a lot love, give and take system. Occasionally we also argue of course, like in our own home as well, but it is just small argument that we could easily settle with each other, and never reached to a point where you could call violence (Hasnah).

We make sure that the women are in some kind of group activities each day. We are aware that differences in the women's background, believes and cultures might create uncomfortable feelings amongst them. By doing group work, they will get to know each other better, learn to socialize again. We observed that the women gain greater support with each other (SW Nina).

Mula and Mita met at the refuge and became good friends. They felt the need to continue to support each other when they left the refuge. At time of the interviews

they were staying together. Mula had recently remarried and her new husband is happy to have Mita and her children to continue staying with them.

I make new friends in the refuge, but remain close friend with Mita. She is very good, so I feel confident that we could be of help to each other, emotionally and financially. I am flatting with her. We pay bills together. I am married recently and my new husband doesn't mind Mita staying with us (Mula).

Basic support such as physical assistance is apparently important. But equally important are psychological and social support for the women facing stressful circumstances. Psychological and social support carries significant weight as an aid to recovery for the women. The willingness and ability to create such a recovery environment by the women with similar experiences of living in a violent relationship is a trend that needs to be encouraged and maintained in the refuge.

8.10.4 Therapy services

Below I discuss the different approaches of the therapy services that I observed during my fieldwork.

8.10.4.1 Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

The women's accounts in this study showed how they internalized the victim's role and expressed their feelings of being oppressed in various symptomatic manners such as being afraid, worried, uncertain, confused, depressed, fragile and vulnerable; experiences that were developed through the abuse which they had experienced. The effects of the violence resulted in the women feeling low esteem and worthlessness. The women's testimonies indicated that only after many years experience of violence, and only when they have exhausted their coping mechanisms, will they begin to disclose their stories to others whom they trust, and gradually get themselves involved with group activities.

During my fieldwork at refuge 1, I had the opportunity to observe group CBT sessions in the form of role play, organized and run by an internship student from Germany. Fatima and Reb explained;

We also played drama on how to handle our emotion and anger management. In this way we not only learn to handle our hot tempered husband at home but also when we face the outside world (Fatima).

We play drama and that was fantastic. It helps to bring things out. We see things that happened to us like in the movie. The experience of being abused was like recorded and tape, and that are kept inside us. When we play it out, we will see and feel it clearly as we do it again in action. It does help to trigger us to reflect and think, because we make it real again by the play, yet not in a scary and real threatening environment. So we are able to feel our action through the action as plan and feel what is next [drama]. That feeling was so real, so real (Reb).

Another woman saw this session as one that improved expressive skills and communication with people.

So we were asked to act like in dramas where we act like... we enter an office...of a company and others [social worker and other residents] observed and later give feedback about how we interact with the interviewers. Through this process we learn how to improve our communication and interaction with people (Safa).

We also learnt about interviews and be impressive during the interviews. These include the way we dressed, the way we communicate and interact (Mita).

CBT activities gave the women opportunities to examine and modify their beliefs, identify emotions and appropriate responding behaviours. Through a trusting therapeutic relationship the women can be encouraged to learn self-enhancing ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Through this process the women can be

empowered to develop strategies for change, self control, and personal safety in their lives.

8.10.4.2 Spirituality¹⁷

In Malaysia, spirituality and belief in God is never absent and is a force for survival and transformation. This deep-rooted culture in the country, also encouraged in the refuge, does enhance spiritual healing for abused women. Belief in the higher power has proved its worth. The women's accounts in this study, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, emphasized the importance of belief in God and the increased ability to understand God's words. The women's accounts indicated that performing routine spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation and the reading of religious texts, facilitates relaxation and calmness. Such activities reduce distress and promote sleep. Religious faith is a powerful aspect of human experience. Not only did the women in the study affirm their faith in the power of God, but this was also a belief of the director of one of my study refuge, Mak Pah. Her own testimony, experience of being abused and how she recovered from the impact of her trauma to reconstruct self and to the establishment of refuge 1 was made possible both through challenges and opportunity. Her experiences afforded her an opportunity for a redirection of energy and intention. The process of her transformation revolved around a spiritual and higher self and her strong faith in God.

8.11 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the women tried to overcome their crises. Their stay at the refuge helped them to feel safe. I have discussed the support given to women in the refuge. The practical and emotional support was particularly valuable. The company and mutual support of other women in the refuge were equally beneficial. It gave them greater strength to overcome the crisis, and helped to build their self esteem and confidence. Through a wide range of programmes and activities where women were actively involved the women began to learn to stand on their own two

¹⁷ In the Malaysian context spirituality equates with religion. The rituals and practices in their religious context such as prayer, meditations, reading of religious texts, nasyid, are considered therapeutic. Such practices are commonly done in a group though doing them alone can be effective as well.

feet as they assumed responsibility and accountability for themselves. They learned to control their own emotions and they learned to be social beings again. Most importantly, they began to learn to achieve autonomy, and the journey was experienced as an empowering process. Hitherto, the thesis has highlighted that the practical and emotional support in the refuge is essential in the recovery process.

In the next chapter, I discuss a further aspect of the study; women's voices on leaving the refuge and their planning for the future.

Chapter 9 Leaving the Refuge and Planning for the Future

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present interrelated and interdependent themes of women's experiences before leaving the refuge and their planning for the future. The themes include reconstruction, moving towards independence, assuming control over their lives, hoping to achieve 'self actualization', and hope for public cooperation and support. This chapter also describes the situation of those who have left the refuge. This is followed by a discussion on supporting women after they left the refuge: housing, resettlement, how the women sustained life after refuge.

9.2 Reconstruction

For some women, the refuge seems to be a place for a chosen solitude. Staying in the refuge provides the women with the space and time that are needed to reflect on what happened to them in the past. They take this opportunity of staying in the refuge for creative reflection on their past, and building up their strength. Some women use this as an opportunity to begin the process of planning what to do next.

The refuge is a temporary shelter, at the same time we can find alternatives and temporarily can stay here while findings ways, think and plan what we are suppose to do next (Safa).

I felt the sense of quiet peace during my stay at the refuge. That was the time and opportunity I could take to develop myself. The positive construction was gradual. It takes days and weeks and months only to develop positive thinking, and takes other months to develop confident and to move on with life again. So I began planning what I would do next to reconstruct my life (Hasnah).

While in the refuge, I felt there was plenty of time for us to rest and recover, to learn about our weaknesses and recognized our strength. I was off and on into the refuge and it was frightening when I left the refuge each time and returned to my husband as I anticipated further abused from him. But this time... the last time I left, we were divorced with the help of SW Sheeta. I was ready, brave enough to embrace risk and plan my independent living. It need

a careful thought out plan to end the misery, and being too dependent on others (Pamela).

9.3 Moving towards independence

When women first leave their home, getting away from the abusive husband, they seek empathy. The women look for people to understand their painful life experiences. The refuge gives answers to the women's cries. With internal realization, with the continuous motivation, support and guidance from the social workers the women build the courage to reconstruct their lives and try to think about independent living.

When I first left my abusive husband, what I seek for is a pity, sympathy from anybody around which is a shame enough to ask for. But to my amazement when I stay in this shelters I learned that it is just not running away from him, it is learning about myself again, learning how to develop my confident, only then woman like me could begin to think and focus about our future. Otherwise after you run away from the abuser, away for few days or week, you feel okay a bit, you will return to him again to find out that he is still the same abusive man. That's stupid; I am not going to do that again. Now that I am developing my sewing skills and secured work at my friend's tailor shop, I can earn my living. Who knows in the future I could start my own small business as well (Emily).

When the women first arrive at the refuge, after signing all forms and other protocols, show their room and get them feel settle. Then we usually asked them, how we could help. Their common response would be a lot of cries, indicating their need for lots of sympathy and shoulders to cry on. You won't hear much of their voices. Usually after a day stay in this refuge we have a more intensive session. Go and dig deep [probe] into their experiences and problems, and then we will asked them what are their expectations from the refuge, what are their plan and again we asked how we could be of help. The follow up will be a lot of constant counselling, constant motivation, constant

support and guidance. You will see some women, slowly but surely they will achieve some degree of esteem. After months you will see some women who are keeners, significantly show their beginning independency in the way they move and think. It's a great satisfaction to us as social workers (SW Nina).

Since I left the refuge last 2 years 3 months, I work as a child minder and social worker at the child care center. I enjoyed and am passionate about my work. This was because I used to be abused by my step mother as a child, then when I get married, my husband abused me. So I fully understand these children and women's experiences and I heartedly want to help them. I am confident and plan to open my own child care center. Start with small scale center and now I am in the midst of hunting for apartment to rent and start the center soon, probably next year (Amina).

I have planned and discussed with the social workers to help and assist me with starting a small scale laundry service, but I can't because I haven't have much saving. The social worker, Sheeta is in the process of contacting some sponsor and experience people to help me. I am also still researching for marketable place and thinking of my budget. It is a long way....but I think I will be there. Meanwhile I am working as administrative assistance at the local laundry (Pasra).

While Emily, Amina and Pasra have found employment, Safa is looking for the best alternatives of what she can do when she leaves the refuge. Safa first looked into possibilities of returning to Singapore, to work again, which she has discussed with her sister in law [her brother's wife, who has been supportive to her].

My plan is to go back to Singapore, and find a job there and at the same time I want to go for some courses related to business studies. I always wanted to own a business. In fact I have already discussed with my sister in law. It is a bit tricky in Singapore, you can open a business but the Malay market will only for Malays [ethnic minority in Singapore]. Yeah....the Chinese....they

monopolized the business and market in Singapore. They are in control and they can easily get good deal to start and run the business. So I spoke to my sister in law....just a planning....I need to open a business. I need to do something. I cannot just earn as an employee. I need to upgrade my life. I don't know whether I can find a job in Singapore. I don't know whether my previous employer would recruit me back, as my reason for leaving was to get married and be a full time housewife. But I am certain; I need to do something to upgrade my life style. I don't want to just to.....depend on people. So at least....I said I can show to my husband....that without him I can survive. So that means I can be a successful woman.

Safa also looked into the possibilities of moving to Australia with her sister who migrated to Australia a number of year before.

Actually...because....last times my sister gave me a suggestion...because she has been in Australia for quite a while...migrated there. She said that people with professional skills are very much needed in Australia. "Why not you take some courses and follow me, stayed with me, and the income is really good. Also, we can start some business here (Australia)". In fact at that time, I already make up my mind. But what I need to do now is first go back to Singapore, I got to find out and I need to do something about this. I need to ask my lawyer, the process of moving....to Australia. I am aware of the implication....whereby...my husband a...a...a....sure will create some kind of chaos, about our son, about our property and so forth. So this might be the consequences I am going to face I think. So I really need to plan. If I can't proceed to Australia, I surely will go back to Singapore because my sister in laws is going to help me. I am ready and I will do what I have planned.

Like Emily, Pasra, Amina, Safa and some other women in this study, their words are brave, they are courageous and they ring true. The women know they still have a long way to go, but they have learned self-esteem, and are trying to build self-confidence. They know they are developing a new sense of themselves that is a far cry from the women they used to be, who simply surrendered in the battlefield of their abusive

home and become victims. They once ran away, and then returned into 'his' world rather than 'their' world, and that became history. These women have reflected on their experiences in a very critical manner, faced the turning point, and are learning to reconstruct their lives, take control, and prepare for the future.

9.4 Assuming control over their own lives

The women learn to assume control over their lives once they have gained confidence that they can resume independent living. They took the opportunity of staying in the refuge with support, guidance and courage from the social workers and other women alike in order to transform and redesign their lives.

By hearing, seeing and discussing with the women, we acknowledged some women who consider themselves as survivors who transform and redesign their life. For example Suzie volunteered to work at the tailor shop first, gain experience, learned and get her certificates on tailoring, later was employed by the employer. Suzie gradually opens her own tailor shop. Now Suzie is employing Emily [current resident at the refuge] as her assistant at her tailor shop. The women are helping each other, which is fantastic (SW Mak Pah).

Reb always indicates her interest in hair dressing. We encouraged her to seek for some work at the nearby saloon and she was employed as part time worker, assisting at the saloon while she stayed in this refuge. What was amazing, last year I heard Reb started her own small scale hair dressing (SW Jah).

Pamela, one of the former residents in this refuge started her own car wash centre about 7 or 8 months ago. She stayed in the refuge for only five months, but she often follow up for counselling and advice and never failed to turned up for our end of year gathering. I knew her as a woman with courage and determination. She used to plan and discussed about having her own car wash centre while she was in this shelter. That time she did (works) car wash at two centers, and calculated that having her own car wash may be a big challenge

to start but not really difficult to manage. We gave her all the support and encouragement, and introduced her to the welfare service for funding aids to start the ball rolling. The moral of the stories are the women have learned to assume control of their own life and gain independent (SW Sheeta).

Being able to assume control over one's own life is a giant step. The journeys are often forward and backward, but success starts small and progresses in tiny increments before adding up to something bigger. Pamela has this to say:

Major changes in life were made with care. That was why it takes me in and out of the refuge to learn to live independently. I could recall my progress during my recent stay at the refuge. My counseling session was like, at 1 month what I want to do, after 2 months, what is my plan, 3rd month continued with what I plan, then the 4th month and 5th month and gradually my plan get going. That time I was working at the garage, did car wash and I washed so many cars per day. I am now on my own, get a minimum of 10 cars per day, and sometimes double [laugh]. I still need to keep in contact with the refuge when I feel unsteady, I mean the up and down of life (Pamela).

Some women went back to their previous work, but the difference is that they have had the courage to leave their abusive husband and the confidence to stay on their own.

I continue to work with the same private company. I have moved flat so that my husband cannot trace me. I may be needed to change my place of work. I am still looking for new job. My husband knew where I currently work. Maybe he will also find out later if he insists, so I might as well look for other job and leave this town (Fatima).

I plan to further my study. My aunty had agreed to sponsor my higher education. She [aunty] and her husband are very rich and have successful business. Currently, I am looking for universities website, probably further my studies in business and public administration (Puspa).

9.5 Hoping to achieve “self actualization”¹⁸

The women felt a sense of achievement in escaping from the ‘battlefield’, and most importantly felt they were at least free from violence. This was a great achievement; a beginning self actualization that they earlier believed only happened in their wildest dreams.

I was married for 17 years and had separated from my husband for 3 years. He started beating me about 7 years after we were married. For those 10 years it was like living in a war....like hell. I was like in bad shape, beaten with no end. When I managed to run away from him, to this shelter it was a beginning achievement. Gradually, I build myself again. I was in the shelter for 8 months and have really changed. Likeits one of my wildest dream come true, I am now a voluntary social workers part time in this shelter, at the same time working full time clerk at one agency (Hasnah).

It gave me a sense of achievement for the women, to see them walk out of the refuge different when they walk in. This was apparent in some women through the way they walk, the way they talk, their body posture....you can tell the beginning process of their self actualization. Off course, they need further courage and support to proceed to a higher self actualization before we can be confident of their independency (SW Nina).

9.6 Hoping for public cooperation and support

The women hoped for public empathy, societal cooperation and support. They hope to be given the privilege of not fearing to speak out about their experiences of being abused and to be listened to with empathy and understanding. The women have struggled on in isolation, too embarrassed to seek help because it is ‘*hal rumahtangga*’. After many years of experiencing abuse, the women build up their courage to speak out to the authorities concerned. The women had tried previously to get support from various statutory and voluntary agencies. Some women did get support and help in accordance with their need; but the picture that others provided of

¹⁸ Self actualization refers to achieving what one wishes to achieve

the welfare agencies was not flattering. The welfare workers and the professionals sometimes were reluctant to help and the women further suffered agonies of remorse.

Eve who had suffered 20 years of abuse by her husband and for the first time had the courage to report to the police, describes her experience as follows:

After I ran away twice from home, once back to Indonesia, another time to my brother's house here [Malaysia] to escape from my violent husband and the unbearable pain, then I returned to him again in both occasion. I realized that it doesn't help at all. So one day I braved myself and went to the police station to report. Much to my agony, the police said, "I can't take your report. I can't see any wound, bruises or any marked of violence on you". I was made to believe that only if there are bleeding and stitches seen will the case be valid. I was so....so angry. I insisted to get my case reported. Then he respond by saying, "the most is he will be charge, may be around RM2000, and he can pay that amount isn't it. Most cases like this, the women will withdraw their report and the couple will be together again". My anger erupted and I basically shout to him and said, "are you going to see my corpse then you take action?" Then he suggested me to go to the hospital, get the hospital report then he will take my case. I went to the hospital, it was also not easy.....long day waiting....lots of questions. (Eve).

Betty speaks of similar hostility in the public space.

Here [in Malaysia] I am alone. I have nobody, no family. Most of my neighbours are not concerned. Many time they refused to be involved with people problem. Even I scream nobody dared to help. That was one reason why he can hit me and continue to hit me...//...There was only one lady, a Malaysian lady who was so good and willing to help me. She was already quite old. I showed her my bruises everywhere...and she too was so sad and tearing. She said, "I will help you" and she really was committed and she make me feel like she was my mother. She brought me to the few welfare organizations [social welfare organizations and association, religious

department] that should help and assist me with my domestic violence problems and my visa as I am from Vietnam....but I like....there was no point. Nobody is really willing to help, nobody showed it is their responsibilities, it is not their problem. If this Malaysian lady didn't brought me to that department I will never know that I was cheated. So the guy said they also cannot help me. I asked them, "What could I do now, what about our two daughters, what about my visa?" Those people in the office just keep quiet. I breakdown and cried in front the officer. I think this situation should be made visible. Women like us need a lot of help, a lot of cooperation from the public and authority concern to help us in the process of our survival (Betty).

Cathy had the worst experience. Her hope for assistance to find a safe place turned to horror.

I was raised up by my father and my step mother. My step mother was an abuser, so I was abused since I was young. I was married for 16 years and my husband started to be abusive after first year we were married...//...My brothers and sister never would help me, they never like me. I was alone, always alone...//...I ran away from my home town this time so that my husband cannot trace me. I went to the coach station [another town] and stayed there, homeless, disorientated and not knowing what to do. Then I met an acquaintance who makes me believe that I will get help from him only to find out later that he with couples of his friend gang rape me. They tied both my hands and legs, and I struggled with my little energy that was left. I was left with more wound, bruises and further pain and agony (Cathy).

The women in the above cases stated that they had almost nowhere to go and no one in whom they could confide. There was so little support to be found in their surroundings except at the refuge. The women have to learn to create support within themselves, a long and arduous process for the women who have long lived with abusive husbands. The women hope to receive more support and understanding from the community and the society in the future.

9.7 Situation of those who have left the refuge

Some women left the refuge to start living independently. They kept in touch with the refuge for some advice and occasionally seeking further assistance. But as we have seen, the pattern of stay for women in refuge1 differs than that of refuge 2. In refuge 2 the women tended to stay for a shorter period [one night to several months] and would return if the domestic violence recurred and the women are unable to handle the situation. In refuge 1, despite the shelter's obvious limitation of space, some women remain staying in the refuge for more than six months. A few women make no plans for post refuge life.

9.7.1. Refuge as a revolving door

Some women return off and on to the refuge using it like a revolving door. The refuge is considered as a place to escape when the violence is unbearable, when there is nowhere to run to, and as an immediate remedy for the overwhelming terror. Thus the refuge serves as a cooling down period and the women will return home again once they feel better.

I left home several times when my husband continuously beat me for few days. I will run to the refuge in my own town few times then I returned home, also ever ran away few days and homeless, but not with my children (Cathy).

I stayed in the refuge twice in 2003. First stay was a month and I went back home. Second time was 15 days (Amina).

After I stayed and left the refuge 2 for the first time, year 2002, I was still not confident. After this second time, year 2004, I feel more confident, but still I keep on calling them [social workers] because I know they will answer my call and talk with me (Fatima).

For Eve, this was the first time she had stayed in a refuge. However it was the third time she had run away from home after 20 years being abused married to the same man. The first time she flew back to Indonesia for about 10 months and returned

thinking that her children needed a father figure. The second time she ran to her brother, and stayed at his home for 10 days, and again returned to her abusive husband. At the time of the interview, she had been staying in the refuge for 11/12 months.

I ever ran away from home for about 10 months. I went back to Indonesia because that time I handle my passport. I don't know for what reason, I came back to Malaysia, and stayed at my mother in law house. Then he pledged and begged me to come back. I returned to him for the sake of my son. He never change, the abused continued. Then, I forgot which year, I can't stand the beating, I ran to my brother house. After 10 days I again returned to him [husband], I don't know why. This time, I was so injured, I went to the hospital, bleeding, get treated and they referred me to the social workers and the social workers brought me to this refuge after I told them my lengthy stories (Eve).

Reb and Pamela have also been staying on and off in the refuge before they successfully started their own businesses left their abusive husbands and were able to live independently.

In 1997 I was in an out of the refuge, approximately a year because I have no place to stay. Now I am proud (Reb).

Pamela had been on and off into the refuge for 9 years before she learned to be independent, left the refuge and divorced her abusive husband.

. it takes me in and out of the refuge to learn to live independently...//...I was married at the tender age of 18 years, uneducated and unskilled (Pamela).

Pasra was married 19 years, was abused by her husband for 16 years, separated from her husband for 2 years and at time of interview was in the process of gaining a divorce.

I reported my case to the police after suffers many years of abused from my husband. The police introduced me to this refuge and I first went to the refuge

for help in 1994. Then I was out and in again for 5 times. I stayed in the refuge for 3 weeks to 1 and half months. Sometime I ran to my mother house and stay there for a while (Pasra).

Safa who had been in the refuge for the last four months, talked about other women who come to the refuge, then leave, and then return again several times.

...actually I stayed the longest here it look, because it has been four months that I am here. Others [other women] keep on coming in and out. So I met a lot of people, with various characters and experiences (Safa).

9.7.2 Major limitations to independence

Some women, after many years of living in violent relationships, experiencing pain and the politics of domination by their abusive husband, cannot yet think of being independent, let alone living independently. The very act of describing the pain to others, and admitting it out loud to herself is an uncharted territory.

The act of speaking out, telling people about my experiences living with a violent husband is entirely new to me (Ramlah).

I never dare to speak to people about my husband beating me. This is my first time (Suli).

The women are still unable to move on from the role of passive victims and are as yet unable to expand construction of themselves. Perhaps they will need more courage and time to become an active self. They feel multiple restrictions to self-help and planning for radical changes to their life. I asked the women, what their plans were when they left the refuge.

To start something new is so frightening (Ramlah).

I don't know. I am terrified at the prospect of having to leave this refuge (Suli).

That's it...I am...I also...staying in this refuge is for temporary measures isn't it....I don't know...my son...I don't know [Pause...weeping]. What about my son. My father in law, my mother in law, my brother in law....if I am to discussed with them my problems, all of them will said, give him another chance, another time as I never report to the police and any other authority all this while. So I don't know how and what to plan (Eve).

Cathy, staying in the refuge for the last eight months similarly felt too inadequate to be on her own.

I don't know. I haven't thought of leaving this refuge yet. I haven't thought of staying out of this refuge. I got to wait till I feel strong enough to face the world, till I have the strength to start my own life.....I am aware that I cannot stay in this home forever. I knew that I need to earn a living. So I need to find some work (Cathy).

Sarima was raised in an orphanage, doesn't know who and where her parents were, and has no brother or sister. Sarima was abused by her husband for five years since they were married. She had been staying in the refuge for one year and feels socially and economically dependant still.

Currently, I have no plan yet. I don't dare to plan how to move on outside, and neither do I dare to return to my husband again. I am happy to stay in this refuge as long as Mak Pah employed me to assist her in some social works, earn bits and pieces in baking cake, do handicraft and so forth. I haven't the confident to stay out yet. I don't dare to stay on my own and don't have enough money to start live outside (Sarima).

Ruby has supporting parents who are happy to accommodate her and her children.

I plan to proceed for divorce from him. I will stay with my parent first. I have work this out with my parent. As a hairstylist working 6 days a week with two son to take care of, I think I can't manage to stay on my own and be

independent. After all my parent love me and really love my boys as well
(Ruby).

9.7.3 Volunteer social workers among ex-residents

Some women voluntarily work in the refuge as social workers, and as mentors to the new residents. These women not only learn to survive, but also to develop the ability and strength to help other women who have similar experiences of being abused by their men. They become involved and engaged with the feminist and the activist movement. They also learn to fight patriarchal society through campaigns and fund raising.

I told Mak Pah that I want to volunteer as part time social worker. Mak Pah and other social workers are more than happy with my proposal andyes...when I am not working [over the weekend] at the office, you will see me at this shelter. I was a hostile, reserved person before I enter the shelter. I have learnt to socialize though it takes many months to see the changes in me. I also have learnt to sympathize with other women and their children who suffer the violence from their husband (Hasnah).

Some women, after many months in the refuge, remain in residence, not as dependant residents, but as volunteer social workers. Kamaliah for example has been staying at the refuge for one and a half years.

As up till now I haven't any plan. I am a single parent [divorced] for a year already and have a daughter with me. I am not employed, not educated, and no skills. The only things I am good at are baking cakes.....all sort including pastry. So everyday in this refuge, I will make pastry and cakes for our consumption and for sale. I help and assist in what I could. Sometime Mak Pah asked me to help at the child care centre. I am happy the way it is
(Kamaliah).

9.7.4 Independent living and “follow up” with the refuge

Some of the women in this study have escaped from the abusive relationship and live apart from the abuser. They move forward and lead autonomous lives. They contact the refuge with the confidence to offer “follow up” work, and occasional help such as campaigning, fund raising, or even for partying. I asked the women, “Do you maintain contact with the refuge?” Among the positive responses were:

Both ways contact. I will come for party for mother's day, Christmas and Eid. The refuge also contact as well as I always volunteers in the refuge jumble sale to raise fund for the refuge. I also volunteer distributing pamphlets and brochures for them (Reb).

Yes, I continue to call the social worker in the last 2 months. I will joint their end of year gathering that is end of this month. Sometimes I help them when they are sales or when they arrange for some campaign for violence against women, distribute pamphlets and brochures. Oh yes, last month Sheeta called me if I am willing to participate and be interviewed by a researcher, is that you? (Ruby).

We are in good contact with Sheeta and the refuge. I will call them now and then for advices when I need to and they are willing to help. I will never miss the end of year Christmas party and gathering (Pamela).

Yeah, I always contact the refuge, after I left (Mita).

I am still in contact with the refuge. I call them sometime (Puspa).

I always contact Sheeta when I am in trouble. On 17December 2005, they are organizing a Christmas party that I look forward to each year. It is time for us (residents and ex residents of the refuge) to catch up with each other. All the ex residents are in the same book, so it is always easy to talk with each other. It is always inspirational and feeling good after the meeting (Pasra).

All the women in this study are works in progress, as indeed we all are. Women volunteered to be participants in this study because they felt that they need to tell their stories in order for people to understand where they have been and in order to heal their wounds.

Just by listening to my experiences is good enough. It gave me great relieve (Alis).

I really appreciate your willingness to listen to my stories (Eve).

In fact it has been so painful to keep our stories to our self, now that I feel more at ease (Julia).

Sharing our experiences of being abused to people we could trust is very comforting (Lily).

Not many people have the patience to listen to our problem; this meeting was of great opportunity and gave me some relieved (Cathy).

Thank you for listening to my issues of being abused (Gina).

The pain get off my chest by talking my stories out to people like you do, the social workers, the women who shows their empathy to women like us (Safa).

It is the collective telling of the women's stories that will expose the essence of domestic violence, especially in Malaysia, where the issues are still considered a taboo and a private topic. By exposing domestic violence with united voices, describing loudly and clearly the abuse, the violence and the damage done to their emotions, minds, bodies and spirits, the women hope that the issue of domestic violence will be translated into socio-political pressure, for violence against women to be considered simply as a crime which should never be tolerated.

Such hopes prevailed as the women received help and support in the refuge. The women's testimonies in this study revealed their hopes of achieving self actualization

in life and their desire for public cooperation and support. They wished to move towards independence. How will such hopes materialize? What help and support are there for the women moving from living in a 'surreal' world to the real world? The following section takes the journey further into the world of the women beyond the refuge; from a fluid to a more permanent space. What needs do they have in a permanent space?

9.8 Supporting women after leaving the refuge

In the following section I will discuss the housing support for women who leave a violent relationship. This is followed by a discussion of continued group work and support, emphasizing the importance of outreach. Finally this section presents issues of sustainability under the sub headings of reinforcement, equality and relationships and connecting with others to maintain change.

9.8.1 Housing

Most of the women in the study were satisfied with the services as a whole. Significantly, they were grateful for having a safe home in the refuge with supportive people who were assisting them to rebuild their lives.

As we have seen, the developed welfare states in the UK and US, provide women with a home to flee their violent relationship and be independent. Housing support for women who flee their violence is not readily available in Malaysia. The women are housed in the refuge to meet their immediate and short term needs. One social worker in this study stated:

The shelters are usually very much of a temporary measures for cooling down period and many would returned to their husband and the cycle of violence continued (Laura, professional).

The virtual non availability of welfare state housing is still the situation, as the current study shows. Malaysia is a developing country but not well established as a welfare state. The society is in transition from one of traditional kinship networks to one that demands duty and obligations that involve the state. The women in this study

created their own alternatives and sought to solve housing issues through family, relatives and friends. There seems to be very little choice in term of locations, apart from the scarce help offered by family, relatives or friends. Social workers Laura and Esah elaborated:

You can quite commonly hear that the women have other places to run to. They ran to their parent, their siblings, their relatives and some to their friends, depending on the willingness of their kin in term of support (Laura, profesional).

Some abused women who disclosed their experiences of being abused to their family members will get support from their family. This is quite common amongst the elite who have excellent economic background, commonly the rich entrepreneurs' family. The family took the women from their home and accommodated them at their family second house (Esah, professional).

9.8.2 Outreach/ Resettlement

Outreach includes support to the women during the period of moving out of the refuge and settling in the new community. Help and intervention for abused women should be extended beyond the crisis to include on-going support. It is an experience of great change to the women and children who choose to leave their home. Upon leaving the refuge, going back into the public space, perhaps with a lack confidence and low self esteem, the women needed the workers to help initiate their new contacts and networks. The new people, a new community, and new schools for the children can be very challenging for both the woman and her children. Adaptation to this new environment can be helped and enhanced by the outreach support services. The workers can provide information and access to other type of support and contacts within the community. Information can help enhance the women's abilities to develop networks in the community. Where required, the workers can offer their availability for practical and emotional support, make regular visits to the women and provide telephone contacts for helplines.

No structured outreach programme was mentioned by the workers and the ex-residents in my study. It seems that the women are very much on their own after they leave the refuge. However the refuge continues to give help and support to individual women who actively seek support, as one social worker demonstrated:

We not only help women while they are in our refuge. We also follow up when they left the refuge when they requested for help, for example with housing, children, school and so forth (SW Sheeta).

In Malaysia, the term outreach is usually applied to mass or group approaches rather than individual approach. The programme involves awareness raising and reaching out to women so that they may contact the service for support. Women's Centre for Change (WCC) in Penang for example is active in reaching out to the community, both urban and rural, such as the schools, associations and communities, and factories. WCC also regularly responds to invitations to give talks and organize workshops on women's issues particularly on the issues of domestic violence, rape and women's position in society (Community Outreach, 2005, Annual Review 2004, Penang). Both of the refuges in my study were engaged in similar activities to the WCC in their out reach programme, actively campaigning to curb violence against women.

9.8.3 Sustainability

To ensure sustainability, there are three perspectives to be considered. These include reinforcement, equality and relationships and connecting with others to maintain change.

9.8.3.1 Reinforcement

To enable the women to have life after the refuge, a mechanism of reinforcement needs to be established. Part of this mechanism was developed while the women stayed in the refuge, through practical and emotional support such as counselling, group work and support, skill building programmes, a spirituality programme and activities and therapy services. There must be an internal awakening combined with

external supports that serve as reinforcement for the women in order for them to leave the cycle of male partner violence.

The reinforcement springs from *internal factors* that drive the women to move on. One internal factor is the changed perception of the self into one with identity, self esteem and confidence. This positive belief makes the woman capable of living free from violence from her male partner.

A second internal factor that acts as reinforcement is the women's own effort to improve themselves. It begins with recognizing their potential through developing skills and knowledge rather than remaining unskilled and dependent on their irresponsible partner. Skill building activities might be new to the women, and they have a lasting impact and improve the quality of the woman's life. This may lead them to handle their life better and may lead to increased economic independence.

Another form of reinforcement is the women's 'own self motivation and their courage' (Masterson, 2005) to move on with life. The women have learnt to be able to talk themselves into a positive emotional state in order to lift their mental and spiritual energies. In this way negative beliefs can be changed or redirected in order for the woman to feel inner strength and resolve returning. Motivations and self empowerment are driving forces that make the women believe that they can face challenges, and increase belief in their ability to thrive. Once motivated and empowered, the women find the energy within in order to move forward and take charge. The women's accounts in this study suggest that if one is motivated and empowered and has self determination, one can fulfil one's potential. Some of the women in this study have begun to *reconstruct independent living*.

Spirituality is the fourth internal factor that serves as reinforcement for the women's lives. Spirituality equates with religion in the Malaysian context. The women's accounts in this study speak of religion as their way to find love, mercy and dignity. Their daily prayers help them find calmness and serenity. They talk about reading the religious text and understanding its content as a revelation. In the face of domestic

violence these beliefs help them in their process of transformation from victim to survivor.

As Oduyoye has stated;

“It is God moving in and through us to accomplish a mission of peace with justice which will result in a beautiful world, a new creation, no longer hostile” (Oduyoye 1996 pp.163).

In this context, spirituality comes from one’s attitude and interpretation of life. It explains how women search for direction and meaning in life and why some cope better than others by means of their spiritual resources. Oduyoye’s statement seems to suggest some answer to the phenomenon of how women survive the challenges in their hostile world. Survival itself is already felt as liberation. In addition, belief in spirituality gives the women the power to reconstruct and transform themselves and move on and not to give up with life.

9.8.3.2 Equality and relationship

To eliminate violence in a marriage, for women who decide to remain in a relationship with their partner after leaving the refuge, the balance of power must be equalized between the spouses. They need to gain mutuality of power and control, mutual respect and values that imply consensus between the partners. In order to introduce and sustain this balance, the male partner must be willing to understand and accept the changes in their social circumstances: the woman’s perception of who she is as opposed to who she was before, her rights and responsibilities and the need to have new values of mutual respect in their interactions and behavior. This can be very challenging for women and men as my study shows. Society may refuse to depart from the ideology of paternal dominance in a household. As one of the participants in this study elaborated:

The government [Malaysia] emphasizes family as a fundamental unit. Within this family system, the family is referred to the paternal dominance [authority of the man] over all others in a household (Laura, professional).

For women who leave the abusive partner, change is equally important. The positive perception of themselves, their identity and their empowerment serve as resources to sustain themselves and their children. Reb and Pamela, Hasnah and Kamaliah in this study for example braved themselves to leave their abusive husband and are now able to live independently.

Indeed, as been pointed by Abrahams (2007), this change in the women's perception of themselves did not mean they had no need of further support, as they are still dealing with the practical and emotional problems of their circumstances. Support needed by each woman varies according to their material and social circumstances. Some might need welfare aid, some might need support for the children such as a new school, or child care minder while they themselves are at work. Some women might need to find alternative housing.

9.8.3.3 Connecting with others to maintain change

Many of the women sought to reconnect with others who could help them to maintain their changes. Abrahams (2007) reminds us of the need for the women to examine the implications of their new understanding of themselves for their families and friends who have known them differently. It might be too simplistic to take for granted that families, old friends and the wider community will agree to accept the changes. Perhaps there is a need for women to sustain change through the development of new friendships, new networks and peer support. While the process can be very challenging it is a worthy move.

9.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed women's readiness to leave the refuge and their planning for the future. Staying at the refuge gave them the opportunity to reflect on their lives and reconstruct them. Some have learnt to be independent again and able to assume control over their life. In their hope to achieve self actualization, they hope for public cooperation and support.

In this chapter, I have also described the situation of the women who have left the refuge. Some of the women went back at times to the refuge, unable to maintain and sustain independent life. But some are confident and braved themselves. They gained independent lives. However they needed support long after they left the refuge.

I then discussed support for women after they have left the refuge. The needs and support offered in other part of the world, such as in the UK and US and other developed countries are not necessarily similar to those available to the women in the context of my study. In housing availability and preference for example, the women are left with little choice of alternatives. Moreover, they may prefer the comfort of family and friends, as opposed to the housing offered by the welfare state for the homeless in the UK and US (Binney et al., 1981; Humphreys et al., 2000). For women in Malaysia, living with family and friends provide social and emotional security. So having state welfare for housing is not mandatory yet for some women. However, it would be very helpful if women could have the choice to live independently.

My study found that spirituality is an important factors for the women in both refuge. This is different in the study done in the UK and US. The UK and US practice in refuge itself does not include spirituality programme, except one study in USA by Gillum, Sullivan and Bybee (2006) where the women develop network with the faith community. However my study found that the ongoing activities in the refuge such as regular group prayer and Quran recitation and the *nasyid* (religious choir) are a revelation and provide calmness to the women and the children. Engagement in other religious activities outside the refuge was also supported by the workers. However, services such as therapy and outreach programmes are not as well established as they are in developed countries. Hence it may be helpful to have a wider choice of different types of support.

The model of 'Women in Crisis - 3 Stages of Intervention' for abused women presented here did not represent a single unified approach. It is a multilayered approach in which the social workers and other support systems appeared to shift

their approaches, depending on what seemed most appropriate to the women at a given point of their crisis and needs. The women needed help and support not only when they are in the refuge but also after they left the refuge. It needs to be emphasized that a woman leaving a violent man is a process, rather than an event. Some women may be able to move on independently, but some may need a longer process, help and assistance. It may involve one exit or several and includes the evolution of strategy refinement. The strategy refinement will be discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 10 Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits the original research questions in the light of my fieldwork and research data. It looks into whether refuges are a useful approach for domestically abused women in Malaysia. Are the refuges a way forward for women who are threatened by domestic violence? If refuges are a way forward, we need to overcome the obstacles to establishing refuges, and ensure the refuges can be maintained and sustained. Are refuges alone enough? What about the macrostructure shaping the context of the abuse and of women's lives? This study revealed a complex pattern of needs and supports not only in the refuge but in the ecological system within which the women are situated.

10.2 Key findings and discussion

This study started by citing the women within the broader issues and pressures from each level of their ecological system. The women occupy the micro level of the multilayered system surrounded by domestic, social and state networks (see figure 10.1). The collective pressures from the abusive husband, from unhelpful socio cultural practice and from the state policies on issues around domestic violence indicate the complexity of women's lives.

10.2.1 Consistent patriarchal dominance

In Chapter 2 (section 2.3, 2.4), the study reviewed the literature on patriarchal attitudes toward women in Malaysia (WAO, 2001; Nora, 1998; Noraini, 1997). Both in this chapter and chapter 3 (section 3.2.2) research in the Malaysian context (Jamayah et al., 2005, Putit, 2001; Rashidah et al., 1994) provided evidence that women were being oppressed and were frightened of their husbands within an abusive domestic context. Reinforced by the belief that domestic violence is a social stigma and brings shame to the family, the women concealed their experiences of being abused and continued to suffer in silence. Similar accounts and attitudes to patriarchy resonate again and again in my study. The fieldwork discussed in Chapter 7 (section 7.4.1.1) revealed that violence against women was kept silent in the name

of 'the family privacy'. Whatever is happening within the home is considered as private; an assumption that is inherent in the concept of "the family". The participants' awareness of "the family" concept was evident in all the interviews. This assumption of privacy has influenced, and continues to influence family lives in general and results in a continuing failure to disclose the violence that is happening in the home, whatever the degree of the women's suffering. The women's situations were made worse by the changing nature of Malaysian culture from a community-based society to one based on individualism.

10.2.2 Transition: community structured to complex individual society

It is clear that there have been dramatic changes from a community-based to a complex individualistic society during the last three decades in Malaysia. Before that, people were living in extended families, the society was relatively static and stable, and social mobility was minimal. However, there has been a dramatic shift from a rural to a predominantly urban society. At home, a simple household has become a more complex social and political institution. People have become more individualized [especially in the city] and the spirit of 'togetherness' in mutual support in the society has diminished. The public are now highly reluctant to interfere with family issues and that includes domestic violence. A perceptive statement from one of the study participants is worth quoting and reads as follows:

Since the last 10 years or so, people move from rural to urban life for better education, better economy and better work. As a result time has become more precious and people's spirit of 'togetherness' in society has diminished. The 'mind your own business' attitude has become a newly acceptable practice in society (Esah, professional).

However the government continues to emphasize the family as the fundamental unit in society. The family ideology defines morality and respectability in its own cultural terms. Literally, the father is the ruler of the family. The community prides itself on upholding traditional cultural ideals and treating a harmonious family and home as a haven. But with domestic violence it is not harmonious or haven.

10.2.3 Women in Crisis - refuge provision

Ironically, the women continued to suffer in silence. As they told me, the experiences ‘erode the core of their being’. Chapter 7 demonstrated the women’s experience of ‘home as a battlefield’, implying that the women were survivors rather than victims. The women began to unravel the complexities of their experiences after many years. Eventually the women came to a decision that they needed to take action and move into the refuge.

In Chapter 7, 8, 9 the model of ‘Women in Crisis - Three Stages of Intervention’ revealed that the pattern of crisis was intricate, as was demonstrated by women while they were in the refuge. They brought to us the nature of their experiences during their initial contact at the refuge. They continued to ‘feel oppressed, in fear, worried, uncertain, depressed, fragile and vulnerable, immobilized and paralysed, lost esteem and confidence and lost direction in life’. Such feelings, thinking and behaving are real, and their predominant need at this stage is to be taken care of and to build trust in themselves and rebuild trust in others.

This calls for appropriate and effective interventions from the service providers and mutual support from the women in the refuge. However, the pattern of crisis varies among the women. As in Hester and Westmarland’s (2004) model of ‘need and support’, the process was found in this study to be non-linear. That is the women did not necessarily move in one direction between the stages of ‘crisis’, ‘stabilization’ and ‘moving on’, and the stages were overlapping. This was presented in detail in chapter 7. I have provisionally used the term ‘post traumatic stress’ (PTS) as opposed to ‘post traumatic stress disorder’(PTSD) to describe the women’s experiences because the former indicates the need for help and social support, while the later limits the scope for social support and crisis management. In addition, I agreed with Abraham’s (2004) arguments that a blanket diagnosis such as PTSD might ‘potentially disadvantage the women in court action for child contact or residence orders’.

In Chapter 8, the women demonstrated how they tried to overcome their crisis and were supported in various ways by the refuge workers and the setting itself. The practical and emotional support, the company and mutual support of other women in the refuge was particularly beneficial, and gave them the strength not only to overcome the crisis but to build self esteem and confidence again. As a result of this together with the various activities and programmes in which the women were involved, they began to learn 'to stand on their own two feet' as they 'assumed responsibility and accountability for themselves'; 'to control their own emotions'; to 'be social beings again'; to 'achieve autonomy', and the journey was experienced as an empowering process.

In Chapter 9, some women demonstrated their readiness to leave the refuge and their plans for the future, while a few remained uncertain of their ability to live independently. Staying at the refuge gave the women the opportunity to reflect and reconstruct their lives. Some learnt to be independent again and able to assume control over their lives. For others support was still needed long after they left the refuge. In their hope to achieve self actualization, they hoped that they would get cooperation and support from the wider society.

However, it was clear that the refuges in this study face barriers and challenges in fulfilling their aims completely.

10.2.4 Refuge provision: overcoming barriers

Chapter 6, section 6.10 provided evidence of obstacles affecting the implementation and progress of the refuges, history and culture, resources, funding, skills of workers, excessive bureaucracy and infrastructure.

The above barriers are not impossible to surmount, but to do this we need to understand the establishment and provision of refuge elsewhere outside Malaysia. Though the circumstances may be different, much can still be learned from established refuges about how they can maintain their services that prove effective in supporting and helping women. Findings from chapters 6,7,8,9 and from the literature

review in chapter 3, (section 3.6), indicated various ways to overcome barriers, some being more effective than others, and these can be summarized as follows.

- The aims of the refuge need to focus on helping the women in overcoming their crisis. The need for both practical and emotional support needs to be emphasised.
- Because of the criticism of the refuge that it would break the family, one of its objectives is to reiterate that the breaking of the family is not its aim.
- The social stigma applied to abused women by the wider community needs to be removed. Domestic violence is not just a personal issue but a public one.
- Women themselves need to be active and brave in seeking help and to be supported in this.
- The education, professional status and wages for social workers need to be improved to attract more suitable people into the field
- More state funding should be provided to ensure the effective operation of sufficient refuges.

10.2.5 How should a refuge work?

The findings from this study (chapter 3, 7, 8, 9,) demonstrated that refuges cannot function only as shelters but also need to include programmes and activities to enhance skill building. Hence they need to create an enabling environment conducive to developing women's esteem, self help and empowerment. There needs to be greater emphasis on having qualified, committed workers in the refuge especially in gender sensitization programme. Refuges need to have available secure funding, and grants that can sustain their budget requirements.

Moreover, staff working and volunteering in the refuge should be trained to be gender sensitive in terms of policies, implementation of the information system and counselling to ensure the effectiveness of the service rendered to the women. The social workers also need to be aware that the women's needs change with time and

the stage of the crisis. They need to be sensitive about differences in ethnicity and religion, for appropriate support. This means that there must be an individual approach to each woman, on top of the group approach in their programme and activities.

The women needed a refuge as one part of their support, provided the refuge offered the programme and activities that help build the women's esteem, confidence and empowerment. The women obviously needed various other forms of help and support besides seeking for safe shelters. Once the abused women are empowered, we can be confident that they will be able to develop their socio economic and social status especially women who were unemployed and unskilled, and regain the confidence to live independently.

10.2.6 Beyond the refuge

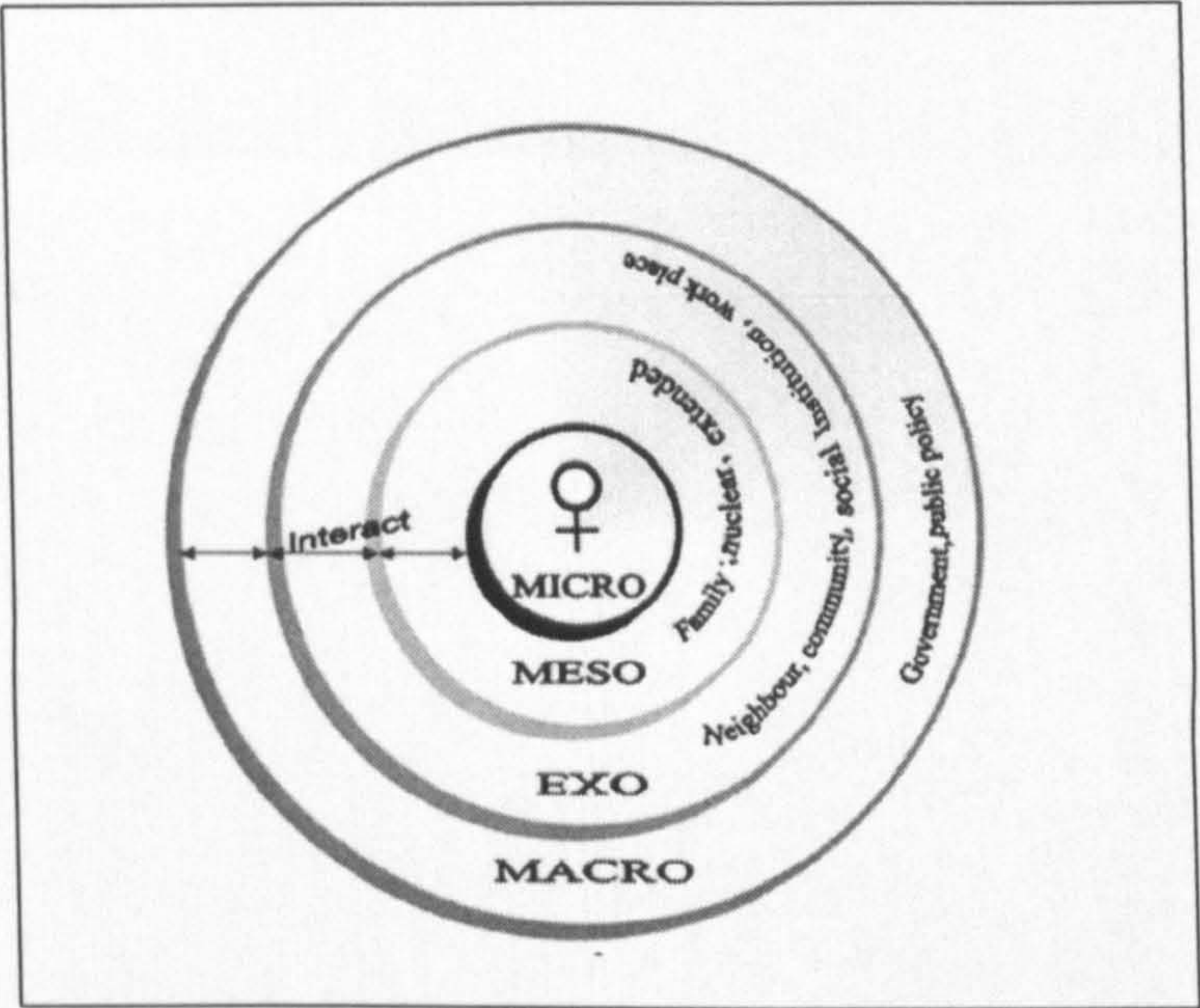
Though critical, however, offering refuges alone is not enough. Refuges can only be one part of the solution. As we have seen, refuges are presented as places that provide safety and support, and help to build esteem, confidence and empowerment in women. However refuges serve as a temporary and emergency exit to flee violence from the woman's abusive partner. It is clear that the refuge provides help and support to the women but the increasing amount of domestic violence within society needs to be addressed.

The complex factors that exacerbate domestic violence and influence any abused women's survival strategies cannot be analysed apart from the larger contexts in which violence and its aftermath have occurred. This study revealed that individual strategies applied to these social problems will not be effective and sustainable. Domestic violence is a social problem that demands collective solutions by individuals united in the political pursuit of social change.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2001, 2005) framework helps us to see the interplay between women and their situational and socio-cultural factors. Further, it helps in the development of interventions. This can be seen in figure 10.1 in which all the layers i.e micro, meso, exo and macro relate to each other in an interactive manner.

The innermost of these, where the women are situated, is referred to as the *microsystem*. The outer layers comprise different aspects of her community and society. .

Figure 10.1: “Women’s” ecological system



Women can be seen to be situated in within nested systems of patriarchal dominance. This reflects the reality of Malaysian society where the power is held by men while women are viewed as property (Jamayah et al., 2005; Putit, 2001; Ariffin, 1994). The impact of domestic violence on the individual woman is the result of the behaviour of individuals as well as acts of oppression in the wider society. Women need not only to cope with and survive immediate violence but also to resist further oppression. The women being abused are embedded within a system that should be helping them but adds to their oppression and restricts their access to support. Problems relating to domestic violence are ultimately political since changes will be needed at different levels in the wider society if individual woman are to achieve their rights and become free from abuse. This is what I have illustrated throughout this thesis how women’s ecological system operate in relation to refuge and wider society.

10.3 Recapping on strategies

In this section, approaches to supporting and helping women are examined from an ecological perspective, giving a clearer picture of holistic approaches and strategise specific interventions. We can also analyse the complex ways in which the different levels of contact interweave and examine how specific strategies are applied at different levels and in different contexts.

10.3.1 How are these strategies derived?

The strategies to help and support the women are derived from the findings of my study, using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. This theory highlights the interconnectedness between people and their environment as it is reflected in social interactions. Hence it offers a tool for planning how women can be given help and support through their wider ecological system.

10.3.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory

As we saw in the introductory chapter (see chapter 4, section 4.1 to 4.3.1) Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory describes the interaction between the child and its environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2001, 2005) focuses on child development in its multilayered context, arguing that the child needs to be with someone who can provide a sense of caring. This relationship is fostered by parents or guardians who are within the immediate sphere of the child in relation to its growth and development. The relevant adult is responsible and accountable for the child's upbringing. This kind of relationship indicates the active role of the parent or guardian and the almost passive role of the child.

In the case of children, the extended environment fulfils only a secondary role. For example the parent's workplace will have a secondary relationship with the child. The child is not directly involved with the parent's workplace, but does feel the positive or negative force arising from the parent's workplace through the impact of the parent. So the parental/guardian workplace (exo system) will have an impact on the child but will not provide the complexity of interaction that can be provided by the primary adult. However for adult women the situation is different.

10.3.3 Using Bronfenbrenner to inform the analysis of abused women

The child in Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory appears as a passive recipient of the parent's/ guardian's upbringing in the process of growth and development. But the women in this study are physically and cognitively mature adults. They are not only capable of using available social and material resources but also of contributing to their society, given the opportunity and empowerment. As we have seen in the findings and discussion chapters (Chapter 7, 8, 9), the process of change in the abused women is not just about their growth and development, but the struggle to emerge from crisis. The women's testimonials showed them to be active help seekers, facing numerous barriers within their ecological system as they attempted to end their victimization. At the same time, the women had valuable contributions to make in helping and supporting other abused women, and also helping to eradicate domestic violence. They were interacting directly with factors at meso, exo and macro levels and with the wider system itself. Unlike children they were able to play an active role in shaping their own environment and that of others.

As we have seen in chapter 3,7,8,9, the problem of violence results from the interaction of factors at many different levels: family, community and wider society. The women's accounts showed that domestic violence was exacerbated by cultural beliefs about sex roles and institutional arrangements relating to marriage and the traditional patriarchal family, reinforced by the misinterpretation of Islamic religious teaching. Women revealed that the husband was culturally granted the authority to be in control, to lead, direct and make decisions for his wife and children and that woman need to be obedient to this. Abused women faced numerous barriers within their own communities as they attempted to survive. From these findings we can see the interplay between the woman and wider political, economic and socio-cultural factors.

The literature review on the subject of domestic violence (Jamayah et al., 2005; Hague and Malos 2005; Abrahams, 2004; Putit, 2001) showed the importance of recognizing that the private sphere of the family cannot be separated from the public sphere. These studies emphasize the social support and community resources needed

to enable women to successfully escape domestic violence and live their lives free from violence. Only strategic and effective public response at all levels of the ecological system can ensure a significant reduction and ultimately eradication of domestic violence. This will need to include the provision of economic and material resources to meet women’s needs.

10.4 Recapping on strategies to eradicate domestic violence

This section recaps on the four areas of practice needed to deal with practical issues in domestic violence: *enterprising, linking, reinforcement and sustainability, and preparing the ground* while linking these to the micro, meso, exo and macrolevels referred to by Bronfenbenner. This is also shown diagrammatically in table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Violence Against Women: Strategies using Ecological system

Strategies	Microlevel	Mesolevel	Exolevel	Macrolevel
Enterprising	Awareness, conscious raising Esteem and confidence Empowerment Education and skills	Validating situation Refuge provision Practical and emotional support	Validating situation Refuge provision Practical and emotional support, counselling Helpline Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public understanding impact of violence - Change oppressive social arrangement Developing out reach programme – individual and mass	Helpline - Local and national Websites and potential access Funding project New policies, law Ministry of women, family and community development – proactive and active
Linking	Active	Encourage activities	Reduce isolation Developing group, networking	Coalitions state/national Multi agency approaches
Reinforcement and Sustainability	Active	Economic assistance Providing transitional housing	Refuge provision Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Domestic violence -Family system – redefine husband and wife = egalitarian relationship 	Provide employment Funding project Improve legislation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender equality

			Skills building Provide employment assistance Expand services to women and children Group support Campaign – curbing domestic violence Out reach programme Seminars – domestic violence	
Preparing the ground	Education	Providing transitional housing Assisting order of protection	Advocacy - Police - Court Protection order	Housing Welfare aids – women and children

Enterprising in this context implies courageous undertaking by members of society in changing society’s value system regarding gender-related violence. It includes how the women facilitate themselves and how others facilitate the women in the struggle to fight violence against women. Women should be helped in developing their ability to use their own internal and external resources and in developing action plans that preserve their own and others' lives. Enterprising involves courageously helping women to rebuild their esteem and confidence, recognizing their strength and their capacity. As was discussed in chapter 8 (section 8.4), the process of transformation took place in the refuge through the women’s enthusiasm and through comprehensive programmes set in motion by the refuges such as educational, psychotherapeutic and spiritual activities.

Consciousness-raising about domestic violence and its recognition as a social problem needs to be carried out at all levels of the ecological system. Grass roots action at the micro, meso, exo and macro levels is necessary and that includes the family, community, service providers in the field of domestic violence, policy makers and the state. At the mesolevel, domestic violence should be stigmatized as a crime, and the women should get practical and emotional support from their family. At the exolevel, a variety of sources of support should be available such as developing and improving public understanding of violence against women, helplines, outreach

programmes, and refuge provisions that can provide effective emotional and practical support. At the macro level there is a need to address areas that are under developed and under-resourced such as helplines at local and national level, websites and potential access, funding projects, new policies and law. For example, as had been discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.7.3), it is necessary to look into the effectiveness and loopholes of the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, Malaysia (1996).

The recognition of domestic violence as a public problem will need to be promoted so that respect can be developed for women as equal partners.

Linking involves the networking of individuals with others who share the same experiences, issues and challenges. This networking can provide strengths, new perceptions, possibilities and opportunities for changes to take place. These changes need to involve the recognition of women's rights, and the creation of new opportunities and improved economic status.

Within the refuge, as discussed in section 8.10.3 women's accounts showed their experience of supportive individual relationship, and such psychological and social support carries significant weight as an aid to recovery from the crisis. Upon leaving the refuge, however, Abrahams (2007) and likewise the women in my study recognized that for women to sustain change they need new friendships, new networks and peer support. At the meso and exo level, the family and community could encourage the women to be involved with the community activities, and develop group involvement and networking in various activities. At the macro level, building of a coalition of state and national, and multi agency approaches to address issues of violence against women, pressing for objectives such as a piece of legislation or a public policy, are essential. For example as discussed in section 2.7.1 regarding DVA (1996) and alliance was set up between the Joint Action Group (JAG) that included five women's organizations and WAO (Women's Aid Organisations) trade union, university and consumers' association, Sisters in Islam and individual women, was to fight violence against women. JAG was successful in getting the DVA (1996) finally implemented though DVA (1996) had been gazetted in 1994.

Reinforcement and sustainability means offering physical and emotional help for the women to gain confidence and develop empowerment. The services should be sensitive to the socio cultural and economic aspects of the problem. To sustain independent life that is free from violence requires a socio-cultural and political context that affirms and protects women. This way, the women can live in a society that creates a “generous pattern of cultural and political life, and reduction of fear” (Griffiths, 1995, pp142). Griffiths describe this as allowing individual women the space “to take them on, move between them, and transform them” (ibid, pp142) in pursuit of personal autonomy.

As discussed in Chapter 9, (section 9.8.3.1), a mechanism of reinforcement needs to be established to enable women to gain self-esteem and confidence, and to develop personal autonomy. In the refuge, this take the form of practical and emotional support such as counselling, group work and support, skill building programmes, spirituality programmes and activities and therapy services. Continuous motivation and encouragement from the workers are the driving forces that increase a woman’s belief in her own ability to thrive and face challenges. In chapter 9, the women’s testimonies provides evidence that, once motivated and empowered, coupled with determination and other relevant support, some women in this study have begun to ‘reconstruct independent living’.

Some women, Pamela, Fatima, Emily, Pasra and Amina have actually taken their ‘giant step’ to move into independent living. For some women like Ramlah, Suli, Eve, Cathy, Sarima and Ruby, there seems to be ‘major limitations to independence’. The implication is that these lie within the wider society i.e. the ecological support systems may be inadequate and additional resources to sustain their living independently may be missing. At the meso level support can be from the family, who could help with transitional housing and economic assistance. At the exo level, the refuge can continue education and skills building in the community through outreach programmes, advocates or outreach workers, provide employment and assistance, and expand services to women and children. It can also continue effective public campaigning and seminars emphasizing that domestic violence is a crime. At

the macrolevel, support could be in the form of providing employment, funding projects, improving legislation.

This study, and others related to domestic violence in the western context (Pahl, 1978; Binney et al., 1988; Hoff, 1990; Victim Support, 1992; Humphreys et al., 2000; Hester and Westmarland 2005; Hague and Malos, 2005), provide evidence that such practical support, formal and informal help, and networks are essential to enable women to have life in the community and to ensure sustainability.

Preparing the ground requires knowledge and awareness of the women's value and rights among women themselves as well as trained professionals who need to understand the difficulties and challenges that have originally disempowered the women with whom they work. Women's individual strength is necessary to deal with problems of violence against them, not because women are to be blamed for their weakness, but because of the deep rooted practice of male dominance.

Society also needs to be practical in helping to reduce victimization and repeat-victimization of the women, and reduce attrition rates in the criminal justice system. At the meso level, the family could help with providing transitional housing for women who have to flee violence, and assist in providing protection. At the exo level help such as advocacy is significant. As seen in the UK, and as discussed in chapter 4 (section 4.10), the advocate actively works with the women to obtain appropriate resources, support and interventions and help in various phases simultaneously. In section 4.10, I also examined and discussed studies in the USA (Sullivan and Bybee, 1999, Allen, Bybee and Sullivan, 2004). These studies on women who have left the refuge and received advocacy intervention provide evidence that this had an immediate positive effect on women's social support and effectiveness in obtaining resources. The women's testimonies in these studies demonstrated improvement in their subjective well being and quality of life.

At the macro level, the provision of housing and welfare services to the women and children are paramount if they are to flee the violent home. Otherwise, there is the

likelihood of a return to the violent partner, or the women and their children are forced to endure long periods in emergency accommodations. In the UK, as was shown in chapter 3, (section 3.6.2), reported by Women's Aid Federation (England) and Department of Environment research team (Binney et al., 1981), the Housing Act 1977 and the lobbying of councils by Women's Aid groups have improved women's chances of finding permanent housing.

Refugees in Malaysia do not get funding as they do in the UK from housing benefit and supporting people funding for individual residence. A similar situation is evidence ~~when~~ where women access in refuge in the UK have no recourse to public fund.

10.5 My reflections on this study

I have indicated in chapter 1 (see 1.4) that one of the reasons for embarking on this study was my response to the situation of women who flee domestic violence. One of my previous studies allowed me to see women at a Malaysian emergency center (OSCC). I was inspired to conduct research into their short-term and long-term plans and motivated to look into the services that were available in the community. Hence, this in-depth study of refuge life and support work. I found that refuges are not only necessary but essential in helping women overcome domestic violence. However, there are multiple barriers to the establishment and progress of the refuges examined here and, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter there are various possible approaches to overcoming these barriers and finding ways forward.

Through this study, I became more aware of the multilayered pressures that existed as a result of the dynamics of negative interaction between the women and the wider society. The women's accounts were consequently analysed to indicate what counts and what does not count as help while the women are in crisis (see section 9.6, also chapters 7, 8, 9).

Through this study, I have gained invaluable knowledge and understanding about women in crisis and the different types of practical and emotional support appropriate

and valued at different stages of their experiences with particular relevance to the needs and culture of Malaysia.

I am aware that domestic violence cannot be eliminated in ‘a day’, but progress is essential. The knowledge and experience gained in this study has encouraged me to seek opportunities to explore further in this field (see appendix 8).

10.6 Strengths and limitations of the study

10.6.1 Strengths

A major strength of case study data collection is in the use of many different sources of data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003; Rigas, 1998). This study has used various sources of data, first through the participation of women in this study. They varied in ages (21 – 49 years), backgrounds, ethnicity, religion and life histories, and their semi structured interviews produced rich data and a depth of insight into their complex lives. Data was also enriched through discussions with the director of the refuge and professionals (social workers, academicians, staff nurses, counsellors) who work in the field of domestic violence. Various other related sources, documentary analysis, and simple observation at the refuges have also given depth, balanced information, and verification of the validity and reliability of the study.

Through examining a range of concepts and ideas as indicated in Chapter 5 (sections 5.8) on how to deal with data, this study provides a structured guideline for the manual analysis of qualitative data in more than one language, (rather than using computer software such as *NVIVO*). A further strength was a decision to keep the language as spoken by the participants, thus preserving the nuances which are the vital part of qualitative research.

From analyzing the concept of ‘needs and support’ model developed by Hester and Westmarland (2004), this study provides a model of ‘Women in Crisis - Three Stages of Intervention’ (Chapter 5, 7, 8, 9) as an alternative to shifting the approaches and support depending on what seemed most appropriate to the women at a given point of their crisis and their needs, while in the refuge, and when the women leave the refuge.

This study has added to our knowledge of domestic violence and refuge provision in Malaysia, as very little research had previously been carried out on this subject. The findings of the study can provide effective strategies for women fleeing domestic violence, workers and policy makers, in the Malaysian context. The study works from the small scale (micro) to the larger scale (macro) to demonstrate its implications for policy and practice. For policy makers, this could be utilized for further policy process development. The findings of this study also offer valuable insights to funders, professional, statutory and voluntary agencies who are involved with issues of domestic violence.

10.6.2 Limitations

The study, however, as any other, has its limitations, which should be taken into account in interpreting the findings. The research was confined to the women as residents and ex residents of the two refuges involved, and did not investigate directly the women's subsystem such as the children, extended family, working environment and community. It was not feasible to include all these variables in the study because of constraints on time and resources within the limits of a PhD study.

There are a limited number of refuges in Malaysia. Even so, out of six available refuges, only two volunteered to participate. This led to the problem of wider access to research populations. Its findings cannot be generalized to all refuges in Malaysia but such limitations are inherent in the nature of small scale case studies. However, I agree with Yin's (2003) argument that case studies, like experiments, can be generalized as theoretical propositions. While this study does not represent a 'sample', my goal is 'to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization', (ibid, pp.10).

Ideally if all the refuges had participated in this study, the qualitative data would have been richer. I could also have utilized quantitative analysis in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive frequency and percentages of respondent demographic data could have been collected and analysed such as age, background,

number of children, marital status, job occupation, social economic status. Description would provide a better picture of demographic features of the refugee residents. This looks at the nature of the respondent and establishes the relationship between the variables, not just the narrative accounts of the participants. Inferential statistics could also be utilized in term of investigating differences and similarities between variables among the refugee populations.

Nonetheless, efforts were made, to include all refugees in Malaysia as described in chapter 5.5. As they were not able to participate, I decided to utilize the strengths of the case study research by gathering rich arrays and depth of coverage of information. Various sources of evidence were collected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation, as described in the research design section 5.4 to 5.8. The available data provides invaluable information as I critically analysed and utilized it diligently.

In synopsis, this small scale research is significant for women who experience domestic violence, though possibly not representative of the general population. Further research is required to elucidate the way forward for abused women.

10.7 Directions for future research

In view of the limitations of this study and other issues raised in the course of this research the following research possibilities are suggested.

It would be very constructive to carry out a wider, national and longitudinal study in Malaysia to examine a larger number of refugees and to follow women who have left refugees over a number of years. In particular, it would evaluate the concepts of changed perspectives, the maintaining of change (discussed in chapter 9), the long term effects or otherwise for the women, and the support systems and services of the refugees and the community. This kind of study has not been done in Malaysia. The present study only managed to trace and interview 15 ex residents of the studied refugees, because of time constraint and the difficulties encountered in gaining access to this particular group of women.

The current study focused on women in crisis and their support systems. It would be helpful in the future to carry out a further study about the women's subsystem such as the children, extended family, working environment and their community. Such research might facilitate further enquiry as to what is involved in the supporting process; on the one hand examining the tension created by the subsystem and, on the other hand developing opportunities to help and support the women.

To add a further dimension of analysis (i.e descriptive and inferential statistics) mixed method approaches involving both quantitative and qualitative elements could be employed for future research in the study of refuge provisions in Malaysia. Such study might look into the variable for similarities and differences in term of frequencies in relation to a range of variables.

10.8 Concluding remarks

This study is of importance as it adds new knowledge to an otherwise under researched topic in Malaysia. It shows the reality and importance of refuges for domestic violence survivors, through listening to the service users and the views of those running the organizations, as well as gathering the opinions of the professionals and academics and social workers in domestic violence. Although the study covers only two organisations, nonetheless it serves as a powerful indicator of the needs of service users in refuges. There are some differences between the refuges in the studies which have been discussed in chapter 6. However there appears to be no great disparity between my findings and those from research carried out in other parts of the world. What is apparent is that we need to have more refuges in Malaysia adequately funded and supported.

It is clear from this research that a broad understanding of the societal root causes of the abuse of women is also essential if they are to be helped. In particular it is important to recognise the paradoxes and contradictions arising out of societal values and beliefs in Malaysian society. Once these sources of domestic violence are identified, the ways to solve the problem become more manageable. It is paramount to include not only helping the women recover from their crisis but also to act on the

causes through social and political change. My analysis of domestic violence in the Malaysian context presents a model of support which can not only be drawn upon by policy makers and service providers and used to shape future activism, but also to work 'with and for' abused women and children.

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Appendix 1 Information for participants

Domestic violence: refuge provision in Malaysia

You are invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide, please carefully read and understand the following information. Feel free to ask me if anything is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study. Thank you.

Why am I doing this study?

I am a student in the Graduate Research Programme in School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, UK. As part of my studies I have to complete a research project. My research project is about domestic violence and refuges in Malaysia. I am therefore seeking the views of the service users and providers of the refuges in Malaysia. If you agree to be interviewed, your contributing information about refuges is very important in helping to improve/extending provision for battered women in Malaysia.

Why were you invited to take part?

You are being invited to take part in this study. You are the service user/ service provider of the refuges that have agreed to take part in this study.

What will happen if you take part?

If you decide to take part in this research project, I will arrange a convenient time to interview you. Before the interview, you will be given an opportunity to ask any questions about the projects. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you have given your consent, I will interview you for about not more than an hour. If you agree, I will tape record (audio) the interview as it helps to ensure that nothing is missing or forgotten.

Do you have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether you take part or not. If you do decide to take part, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular questions and to withdraw from

this study at any time without giving reasons. You also have the right to withdraw any information prior to writing of research reports.

What will happen to all the information you provide?

All your information will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be kept and stored anonymously and will only be identified by a reference number. Only I will have the access to the code linking the reference number to each person who takes part. Data from the interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet. I will carry the data as my hand luggage to UK. The audiotape data will be kept for secondary analysis, but will be destroyed following such analysis. The finding of my project will be anonymous so that the identity of all participants will not be recognisable. The findings will be presented as part of my thesis.

Contact for further information

If you have queries about ethical matters relating to this project, you may contact my supervisors (***) at the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Priory Road, Bristol BS8 1TZ. Tel:***.

Appendix 2 Consent to participate in research

Project: **Domestic violence: refuge provision in Malaysia**
Researcher: **Student, University of Bristol, UK**

Please Tick Box

Have you read and understood the information

to participate for this study?

☐

Have you been brief about this study?

☐

Do all of the questions you ask been answered to your satisfaction?

☐

Do you know that you are free to withdraw from the study at any
time, without giving reason and without suffering

any negative consequences?

☐

Do you agree to allow me to tape record your interview?

☐

Do you agree to participate in this study under conditions set
out on the Information Sheet, of which you have a copy.

☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

NB: All names will be replaced with pseudonym throughout this research works,
including writing, to ensure confidentiality.

Appendix 3 Interview guide for service users: present and past users of the refuges

I am aware that these questions are personal, but your answers contribute to our better understanding of domestic violence and refuge in Malaysia.

A. PERSONAL DATA:

Name: ANONYMOUS

Age : _____

Address: ANONYMOUS

Race : _____

Sex : ☐ Male ☐ Female

Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married: From _____ to _____

☐ Separated ☐ Divorce

Education : _____

Spouse: _____

Occupation : _____

Spouse: _____

Numbers of children:

No	Sex	Age
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

No	Sex	Age
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		

B. HISTORY

- How long has you been abused?
Prompt:
 - when did abuse begin?
- Besides this did you receive support else-way?
Prompt:
 - other services/center, family, friends, neighbours, religious body, community leaders

C. THE BEGINNING CONTACT

- What make you enter the refuge?

- What happened when you first came to this refuge?

Prompt:

- As emergency or planned
- Confidentiality
- Confidence?
- Reception process?
- Workers?
- Support?
- What you would like?

D. DURING YOUR STAY

Feelings/emotion

- How do you feel about this refuge?
- How do you feel living with others who have the same experience in this refuge?
- How do you feel about safety here?
- How approachable are people in the refuge?

Opinions/values

- What was your idea of a refuge?
- What do you think about facilities here?
- What impact refuge has on you?
- What do you like about the refuge?
- What is it that you think (in your opinion) you would like more out of the refuge?
- What is your view of refuges for your children?
- What is the effect of refuge on your children?

Knowledge

- How do you find out about the programme?
- How have the programme in this refuge change you?
- How could the programme be improved?

Sensory

- Describe stimuli experience in the refuge
- Day-to-day experiences
- Structure
- Organization
- People

E. ENDING

- Is there anything else that you would like to say about life at this shelter?

PAST USERS: Additional Questions

- What was your plan before you left the refuge?

Prompt:

- What was your involvement with your future plan.
- How far ahead was your planning?
- What was the follow-up?
- Was planning and follow-up helpful. How?

- Do you maintain contact with the refugees?

Prompt:

- With whom; workers, women
- How did the contact happen?
- How often
 - individual, groups
 - formal/informal
- What is/ are your other supports?
- How would you like the support to help?
 - From refuge
 - From other formal/informal support

Appendix 4 Interview guide for workers at the refuges

A. BACKGROUND

- When did you join the refuges?
- How did you become part of the programme?
- What make you choose to work in this refuge?
- What make you go on being involved in this refuge?
- Since you left school, were you involved in any campaign, movements of organizations or societies?
- How is/are your current works relevant to the campaign/movement/societies you have described?
- Have you had any experiences which seem relevant to the work you do at this centre?
- What are you currently working on in the refuge?
- What do you think of your work for the refuge?

B. SERVICES/ ACTIVITIES

- What happens when the women first come to this refuge?
 Prompt:
 - Reception
 - Advocacy
 - Advice/counselling
 - Support
 - Activities – individual/ group
- House meeting
 Prompt:
 - How regular
 - Issues address
 - How does the meeting works – during, after, implementation
- What do you think about the effectiveness of the refuges in meeting the needs of the residents?
 - Is help always (24 hours) available?
 - How was the refuge when you first work?
 - How do you feel it has changed since it was set up?
 - Are the women voices heard?
 - What do you think the women value most?
 - What do you see as its success?
 - Comments for improvement?
- What are the preparations for these women and children, for an independent living environment?
- Tell me about the support provided for non-residents

Appendix 5 Interview guide for manager/ director of the refuges

A. BACKGROUND

- How long have you been working this field?
- How long have you been in this position?

B. ORGANISATION

- Setting-up and development of the centre
 - How did the idea of women shelter come from?
 - From whom did the idea come?
 - What changes has been made since it was set up?
 - Was the change a success?
 - Its failure, if any?
- Philosophy of the refuge
- Objectives of the refuge
- Is the location of this refuge made confidential or published?
 - If confidential, what is the advantages and why?
 - If published, what is the advantages and why?
- Admission rate
- Bed occupancy rate, length of stay

C. SERVICES

- Services offered at the refuge
- How is the refuge operated:
 - passive/active residents
 - women activity
 - children activity
 - providers/governing committee
- Residents Follow up/ Resettlement
Prompt
 - common reason for leaving the refuges
 - What are the procedures when the women leave the refuge?
 - ☆ Confidentiality/security
 - ☆ Future planning
 - What sort of follow-up?
 - ☆ Individual/ group
 - ☆ How long does follow-up goes on?
 - Outreach? (if no follow up)
- Programme that prepare women and children for an independent living environment
- Contact with other agencies

- How is the contact made? What happen when in contact, and how helpful is the link?
 - Statutory
 - The Police
 - Health services
 - Social services
 - Welfare department
 - Solicitors
 - Schools
 - Religious department, please name
 - Non-statutory
 - Any voluntary organizations, please name

- What gets in the way?
 What do you think (if any) that hold you back?
 Prompt:
 - Outside influences, pressures
 - Resources; funds, materials, infrastructure etc
 - Paperwork

Appendix 6 Interview guide for professionals in the field of domestic violence (Social workers other than in the refuge, Academician, Nurses, Activist)

A. BACKGROUND

- How long have you been involving in this field?
- How long have you been in this position?

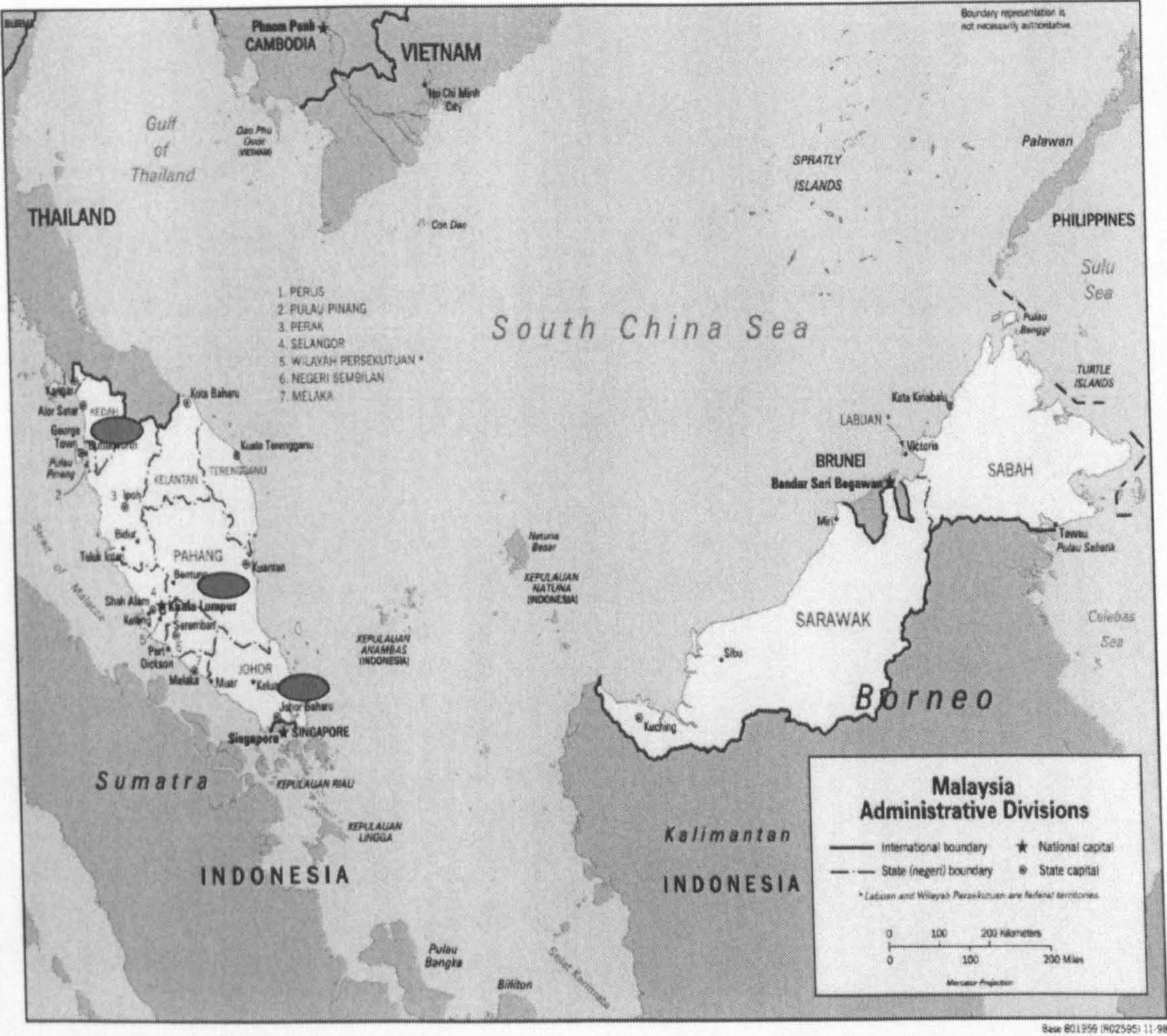
B. SERVICES

- What do you think of current help and support for abused women in Malaysia?
 - How do you think these can be improved?
- Tell me about programme that prepare women and children for an independent living environment
- How helpful is the statutory and non statutory link with abused women?
 - Statutory
 - The Police
 - Health services
 - Social services
 - Welfare department
 - Solicitors
 - Schools
 - Religious department, please name
 - Non-statutory
 - Any voluntary organizations, please name

C. OPINIONS/VALUES

- What is your idea of a refuge as a provision, in Malaysia?
 - What do you think of setting up and development of refuge in Malaysia?
- What was your idea of a refuge for abused women?
- What is your view of refuges for children?

Appendix 7 Refuges in Malaysia



Key: Red circle indicates the geographical position of refuges in West Malaysia

Appendix 8 Published Writings, Presentations in Conferences and Teaching on PhD (2004 - 2008)

Published writings

Zabidah Putit and Dahiri Saini. 2006. '*Perempuan di sebalik dinding kaca*' [Women in within the glass walls]. UNIMAS publication, Malaysia.

Paper and Poster Presentations

Zabidah Putit. 2008. *Researching refuge provision in Malaysia: Domestic violence. Challenges in qualitative data interpretation.* International Conference of Social Policy Association, 24 to 26 June 2008. University of Edinburg, UK.

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Zabidah Putit. 2007. *Paradoxes of Gender, Violence and Religion in Malaysia. Muslim Power versus Islamic Teaching Conference.* 2nd March 2007. Bristol Institute for Public Affair, University of Bristol, UK.

Zabidah Putit. 2007. *Domestic violence: Refuge provision in Malaysia [Poster presentation]. Social Work Postgraduate Research Workshop,* 21 -22 March 2007. Glasgow University, UK.

Zabidah Putit. 2006. *Domestic violence and refuges in Malaysia.* Policy and Politics International Conference. 6-7 July 2006. Kingsdown Conference Centre, Bristol, UK.

Jamayah, S, Napsiah, M, Zabidah, P, Elicabet P.L, (2005). Domestic Violence Against Women. *Proceedings of the International Conference On Gender and Southeast Asia* (pp. 184-190). Bangkok: WARI (Women's Action and Resource Initiative) – [Paper presentation].

Seminar Teacher

Seminar teacher, undergraduate students, 2006. Violence Against Women's module. School Policy Studies, University of Bristol, UK.